

Tuesday  
31 January 2017

Volume 620  
No. 102



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 31 January 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 31 January 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Mr Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Policing and Crime Act 2017  
Wales Act 2017.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Science Funding

1. **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): If he will make it his policy to allocate 3% of GDP on science funding. [908474]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** The first section of our Green Paper on industrial strategy sets out our ambition to make Britain the best nation in the world for scientists, innovators and technical inventors. In support of this, we have announced an increase of £4.7 billion in public research and development funds, which is the biggest increase in support of science for 40 years.

**Lilian Greenwood:** In evidence to the Education Committee last week, Professor Arthur, the president of University College London, spoke not only of the huge sums flowing into UK research from Europe—through Horizon 2020 and the European Research Council, for example—but of the need for a system to replace the mobility of people, networking and the ability to work across multiple boundaries. Does the Secretary of State recognise that if the Eurosceptics in his party prevail and we have a hard Brexit, spending even 3% of GDP on science funding will not be enough to protect our global reputation for scientific research? What is he doing to stand up for the needs of this sector?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady has two eminent universities in her constituency that are going from strength to strength. I agree that it is important that the best researchers from across the world come to our universities, and the Prime Minister said in her Lancaster House speech that that was a priority for our negotiations.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Science funding includes funding for the satellite sector, which is an important industrial base for the UK. The Government

have set a target to grow this sector by a further 10% of global share in the next two decades. What more money could be put into the satellite sector from the industrial strategy challenge fund?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. We say in the strategy that we should build on our strengths, and the satellite sector is a shining British strength that is creating huge numbers of jobs. It is specified throughout the industrial strategy as an area in which we want the industry to work together to ensure that, in particular, we are training the technicians and engineers of the future, which is what we have been doing.

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The industrial strategy rightly points out the crucial significance of investment in science for our future economy and productivity. Given that the USA, Germany and France all outspend us in this area, will the Secretary of State give a commitment that future spending will outstrip theirs to give us a competitive advantage over them?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman is a thoughtful Member with regard to these matters, having chaired the then Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and he will see in the Green Paper that we are candid about the need to maintain the pace. Indeed, we have increased public investment. He was right to mention the US, but actually the proportion of public to business investment is higher in this country than in Germany, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and other countries besides. We are building on strength, but we want to take things further, and I look forward to his contribution to the consultation.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): There is great concern about the future of fusion research after Britain pulls out of the EU and Euratom. Will the Secretary of State reassure us that he will continue to support and fully fund the Joint European Torus project and other joint research projects such as ITER—the international thermonuclear experimental reactor—after Britain leaves the EU?

**Greg Clark:** The collaboration between scientists and those in the nuclear sector is one of the important aspects of the continued co-operation that we want and intend to see continue.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Green Paper makes much of re-announcing the welcome increase in science spending which, following cuts of up to 50% over the last seven years, has finally returned it to the levels under the last Labour Government. Research and development funding, however, remains barely half the recommended 3% target that Labour has committed to. Does the Secretary of State agree that, given the impact of Brexit on UK science, the lack of any overarching vision and the focus on picking sector winners, rather than mobilising the whole—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady—[*Interruption.*] Order. I am sorry, but we have a lot to get through. The Front Benchers, on both sides, must be much more self-disciplined. It is not fair on Back Benchers.

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady does not have it right. She should know—the science sector has welcomed this fact—that we protected funding for science during all the difficult years in which we were recovering from the financial situation that Labour left us. There was a huge welcome for the £2 billion increase, which is the biggest since 1979. In other words, that is bigger than what any Labour Government ever offered.

### Aerospace

2. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace. [908476]

5. **Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace. [908479]

6. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the aerospace industry's contribution to economic growth across the UK. [908480]

11. **Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the international competitiveness of the UK aerospace. [908488]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman):** The UK has the second largest aerospace industry worldwide, with strengths in some of the most technologically advanced parts of aircraft—wings, engines and advanced systems. The sector has annual turnover of around £30 billion and exports of some £25 billion a year.

**Fiona Bruce:** Leading aerospace part designer and manufacturer Senior Aerospace Bird Bellows in my constituency speaks positively of the support from the Government's Sharing in Growth scheme, which it says will be key in helping the company to realise its ambitious growth strategy. Will the Minister join me in congratulating the company on its plans and consider visiting its factory in Congleton to learn more?

**Jesse Norman:** I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating the company. I have visited companies benefiting from the Sharing in Growth programme and I would be delighted to go to see the one in her constituency.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Rochester and Strood has a proud aerospace history, having had the Short Brothers iconic flying boats. It is now home to Aeromet, an important SME that is part of the supply chain for Airbus. Will my hon. Friend outline how his Department will ensure that the UK aerospace supply chain will continue to have unhindered access to major opportunities in our manufacturing industries?

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend will know, the aerospace growth partnership has been a great success, with the Government working closely with industry. As part of that, the Government have made a joint funding commitment with the industry for nearly £4 billion of aerospace research between 2013 and 2026, so I think that the future is relatively well funded.

**Drew Hendry:** What guarantees will the Minister give to ADS, the group representing the UK aerospace industry, which states that it must have

“Access to vital space programmes initiated by the European Space Agency, but funded by specific EU programmes”?

**Jesse Norman:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already talked about the importance of our satellite programmes in this country. The European Space Agency sits outside the EU structure, so it will be handled separately from EU discussions.

**Mr Nigel Evans:** Does my hon. Friend see the signing of the contract in Turkey last week by the United Kingdom and Turkey on the new Turkish fighter jet as an endorsement of the skills and expertise of BAE Systems in this country, and does he foresee future deals with other countries?

**Jesse Norman:** I think that everyone concerned with the aerospace sector will welcome that transaction. It shows how BAE continues to be a global leader in this sector, and we must hope that it goes on to do further such work around the world.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): In the last two years, Glasgow has built more satellites than any other city in Europe, with 100 private and public sector organisations such as Clyde Space contributing more than £130 million to the Scottish economy. This is much credited to Scotland's long-standing strength in engineering, science and technology. As we face the prospect of a hard Tory Brexit, will the Minister make a commitment here and now that Scotland's aerospace sector will be protected and that there will be no detriment to this vital sector and its many jobs?

**Jesse Norman:** The success of Scotland has been part of a wider UK success. I absolutely recognise the point that the hon. Lady mentions. I was in Glasgow only last week, talking to high-tech companies at Glasgow University, and I can absolutely vouch for their quality.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): In my former career as an aerospace engineer—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] They have not heard the question yet, Mr Speaker. In that former career, I saw several examples of our aerospace competitiveness being diminished by the political enforcement of collaboration in engineering across Europe. Will the Minister ensure that future collaboration across Europe on aerospace happens where that is productive, not where it suits geopolitical objectives?

**Jesse Norman:** I admire the subtle and unobtrusive way in which my hon. Friend smuggled his personal experience into that question. I assure him that we will continue to take a thoroughly co-operative approach with European colleagues.

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): The recent “Steel 2020” report noted that steel is a key foundation industry for the UK that underpins our aerospace and automotive sectors, as well as many others. However, in the Government's 130-page industrial strategy Green Paper, steel is mentioned just once. Can the Minister explain why he is neglecting this important industry?

**Jesse Norman:** I am surprised that the hon. Lady says that because the Government have had very productive discussions with the steel industry.

### Self-employment

3. **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908477]

4. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908478]

12. **Victoria Borwick** (Kensington) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908489]

17. **Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the self-employed. [908495]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):** The gov.uk website and the business support helpline provide information on starting and running a business. Growth hubs also provide access to local and national support. Some 4.8 million people are currently self-employed.

**James Cleverly:** When I started a business, I found that one of the most intimidating elements was employing my first member of staff. What more can the Government do to encourage and support the self-employed to grow their company and become employers in their own right?

**Margot James:** We will support entrepreneurs across the UK to ensure that they can access finance and wider support so that they can grow. British Business Bank programmes are already supporting £3.2 billion of finance to more than 51,000 smaller businesses, including start-up loans to 39 entrepreneurs in my hon. Friend's Braintree constituency.

**Robert Courts:** This matter is particularly close to my heart, given that I was self-employed until a few months ago. Of course, there are many self-employed businesses in rural areas of West Oxfordshire. Can the Minister assure us that the Government will continue to make it easier to start and grow a business by deregulating, creating an attractive tax environment, and helping businesses to attract and seek the finance that they need?

**Margot James:** We continue to work hard to make the UK a great place to start and grow a business. According to OECD statistics, we are internationally the third best place to start a businesses, but we are 13th when it comes to the best place to grow a business, which is where my focus as small business Minister is going to lie. I very much welcome the support of my hon. Friend.

**Victoria Borwick:** North Kensington, an area that the Minister knows, has several fantastic initiatives through which new start-ups have access to shared space. Are there any plans to reduce business rates and provide relief for small companies using shared space initiatives?

**Margot James:** The Treasury has no plans specifically for shared work spaces, but at the last Budget, the Chancellor announced £6.7 billion of cuts to benefit all business rate payers. They include permanently doubling small business rate relief and increasing the thresholds from 2017.

**Dr Caroline Johnson:** Will my hon. Friend tell us how the industrial strategy will support disabled people who want to start and grow their own businesses?

**Margot James:** The disabled employment programme is an important part of our work in labour markets, and it is backed by many top retailers. We will continue to press this issue and work with the Department for Work and Pensions for greater access to work for people with disabilities.

**Dame Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab): In order to grow the businesses of the self-employed, they need access to good-quality training. When I met the Doncaster YMCA and its apprentices last week, an issue was raised about clarity regarding funding during the transitional arrangements for the Skills Funding Agency going to the Department for Education. Will the Minister take an urgent look at this?

**Margot James:** I thank the right hon. Lady for bringing this to our attention. A new approach to improving access to skills and apprenticeships is a fundamental part of our new industrial strategy. I will raise the matter that the right hon. Lady mentions with the Secretary of State for Education.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): Many self-employed people recruit apprentices and others who are seeking employment. Given that the report recently produced by the Institute for Fiscal Studies cast doubt on the effectiveness of apprentices, the training scheme and the apprenticeship levy, what are the Government going to do about this?

**Margot James:** Last week the Government launched the new industrial strategy, and the new academies programme for improving skills and access to apprenticeships is working with the existing apprenticeship programme to improve both the quality and number of apprentices.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Given that further education colleges have an important role in providing skills and training and help many people to become self-employed workers, does it make sense to cut their budgets?

**Margot James:** Further education colleges remain an important part of our strategy to improve skills and access to apprenticeships, but they are not the only route to apprenticeships. The apprenticeship levy will increase funding for overall access to skills for our young people.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Compulsory quarterly digital tax updates cause real concern to self-employed people and small businesses. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs says that support is available. Will the Minister tell us what support is available to self-employed businesses and how much money is set aside for that support?

**Margot James:** I am sorry; I did not follow all the hon. Gentleman's question. However, I know that the Treasury is looking into the fairness of taxation as between self-employed people and the rest of the workforce. I will read the hon. Gentleman's question in *Hansard* and write to him accordingly.

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** The ranks of self-employed people are being expanded by an increase in independent working. Will my hon. Friend ensure that labour market regulations are updated so that employee rights are maintained?

**Margot James:** I very much agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's question. The Prime Minister has appointed Matthew Taylor to undertake a review of employment practices in the modern economy to ensure that while we embrace new technologies, we also protect workers' rights.

**Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab):** What are the Government doing about the scourge of bogus self-employment, which too often is a rip-off of the workers concerned and a rip-off of HMRC?

**Margot James:** The Taylor review will also look into that very important issue. A worker's contract with his or her employer is the fundamental basis on which he or she is judged to be self-employed or an employee, and that distinction will be closely scrutinised by Matthew Taylor.

#### SMEs: Kent and Medway

7. **Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to support the growth in the number of SMEs in Kent and Medway. [908481]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):** SMEs in Kent are fundamental to our economy, as they are everywhere else. Through local growth funds, the work of Kent County Council and the business operations of Kent and Medway, the Government will ensure that the area benefits hugely from the increased number of SMEs.

**Rehman Chishti:** In view of the Government's commitment to investment in infrastructure, which will assist businesses in Kent and Medway, will the Minister confirm their commitment to the Lower Thames crossing, along with extra investment for Kent roads, which will provide connectivity for local businesses?

**Margot James:** The Department for Transport will make an announcement, but my hon. Friend should be reassured that Kent County Council and the relevant business organisations are working closely with my Department to ensure that there are extensive improvements in the transport infrastructure in his constituency and the wider county.

**Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I trust that the question will not be on the matter of Linlithgow, but will focus purely on Kent and Medway, in which I am sure the hon. Lady keenly specialises.

**Hannah Bardell:** You can be assured of that, Mr Speaker.

The SMEs in Kent and Medway need someone in government to fight their corner. In July 2015, they were promised a small business commissioner who would focus particularly on late payments. The Federation of Small Businesses and others have raised concerns about the lack of power that the commissioner will have, and the fact that 18 months after the position was created, there is no sign of a commissioner. Will the Minister tell SMEs in Kent and Medway, for which I have the greatest regard, and others throughout the country when the commissioner will be appointed, and whether he or she will have proper powers to ensure that companies that do not pay are taken to task?

**Margot James:** First, I can reassure the hon. Lady that Kent and Medway is ably championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), who asked the original question, but apropos of her specific point, we are in the process of appointing the small business commissioner at the moment; he will be in post by the summer and able to take complaints on the important issue of prompt payment in the autumn of this year.

#### Tidal Energy

8. **Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision. [908483]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman):** The Hendry review published its report earlier this month. The Government are considering its recommendations and the issues that would arise from a broader lagoon programme, including the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons. The Government will publish their response to the Hendry review in due course.

**Tim Loughton:** As an MP with a coastal constituency, I am a big fan of tidal power, and following the Hendry review it has been estimated that building some 10 tidal lagoon power stations by 2030 could generate 10% of our electricity requirements. So when considering the economics of the Swansea Bay scheme, will the Minister take into account the wider benefits for British manufacturing and technology of becoming a world leader in this clean technology?

**Jesse Norman:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to recognise that the question must be considered in the round and not merely on the merits or no of the Swansea Bay scheme. It is the Government's job to consider the advantages and disadvantages of tidal lagoons as a whole and to take a decision that includes not merely the financial elements, but also environmental elements, the capacity to generate power as part of a wider energy mix and ancillary elements.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister surely knows that all kinds of alternative energy, including tidal power, need good recruits; they need trainees and, indeed, apprentices. Is he not hanging his head in shame this morning because of the report of the highly respected Institute for Fiscal Studies which says that this Government's apprenticeship programme is a disaster and should be ripped up and started again? When is he going to get real?

**Mr Speaker:** But purely in relation to tidal lagoons; we are not talking about apprenticeships more widely or seeking to shoehorn a personal interest into a question to which it does not ordinarily apply. But the Minister is a philosopher and dextrous to a fault, so I am sure he will cope.

**Jesse Norman:** Heaven forfend, Mr Speaker, that I should entertain so unworthy a suspicion as to think the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) might have smuggled some entirely unrelated question into a question on tidal lagoons. May I simply reassure him that skills remain at the centre of the Government's concerns, and that is why they feature so prominently in the industrial strategy?

**Mr Speaker:** Marvellous.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): The Minister is quite right to say that he will analyse this in the round, because while I think many of us will recognise the economic advantages, particularly over a long period such as 100 to 150 years, the environmental impact will be considerable. Can he perhaps amplify what sort of things he will be looking at, including how tidal lagoons affect fish life, marine life and bird life?

**Jesse Norman:** It is of course true that, as well as the economic case and value for money issues that that raises, there will be wider consideration of environmental impacts, but in relation not just to individual schemes as they can be understood now, but to the way in which they might concatenate across a programme of tidal lagoons.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): The Government have been very good at supporting the tidal stream generator in Portaferry in Northern Ireland. Can we ensure that we make the most of what is learned from tidal power in devolved Governments and the rest of the UK—not the events in Northern Ireland, but what we generate?

**Jesse Norman:** One hesitates to remind the hon. Gentleman that this is a different matter and a different technology from tidal lagoons, but I think he can take it as read that officials and Ministers will be thinking carefully about all the relevant precedents that might bear on this decision.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The question was about the potential contribution of power generated by tidal lagoons to UK energy provision. My understanding is that a limited deployment of tidal lagoons in the Severn estuary alone would contribute about 8% or more of UK electricity demand. Can the Minister tell me if there is any other technology that

can provide that sort of power in one location—as a clue, perhaps I can suggest to him that Hinkley C running full tilt without any outages is estimated to contribute about 7% to UK energy requirements?

**Jesse Norman:** I dare to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. It is not quite clear what he thinks of as the lagoons in the scheme he describes, but Hinkley Point will be a bigger generator than, certainly, the first round of lagoons, as well as being a higher load and more reliable.

**9. Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What progress his Department is making on implementing the recommendations of the Hendry review on tidal energy. [908485]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman):** The issues considered by the Hendry review are complex, and the Government will be demanding a period of time to assess the recommendations and determine what decision is in the best interests of UK energy consumers. I have already said that we will not be dragging our heels on this, and we will not do so.

**Stephen Doughty:** There is huge potential for tidal energy not only in the Swansea scheme but along the south Wales coast and the Severn estuary and along the north Wales coast. However, I am hearing worrying things about the Department dragging its heels on this. Will the Minister assure me that there will be strong ministerial leadership to take the recommendations forward and to get on with the Swansea scheme and others?

**Jesse Norman:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman would say that, given that it was the Department's expectation that the report might be published before Christmas and that it was in fact published only two or three weeks ago. There is no suggestion that the Department is dragging its heels, and nor will we do so, but we will, in the public interest, give the report proper, thorough consideration on value-for-money and other grounds.

**Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): In a previous answer, the Minister referred to advantages and disadvantages. Does he agree that the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon would not only meet energy needs but provide huge levels of investment in jobs in my constituency and throughout the region? As the Hendry report implies, it could put Wales at the forefront of developing a world-first technology.

**Jesse Norman:** I salute my colleague's proper concern for support and investment in his constituency; that is absolutely right. The wider implications are being considered by the Government, and I remind him that the Hendry review asked for the issues to be considered specifically in the context of power generation, so those things go alongside the wider consideration we are giving to the report.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The Hendry report refers to tidal energy. The Minister will know that the first large-scale tidal steam generator in Northern Ireland, in Strangford Lough, was four times more powerful than any other in the whole world at the time. What consideration will he give to ensuring that the energy

being produced in Strangford Lough can be utilised for the benefit of the whole of Northern Ireland?

**Jesse Norman:** As I have indicated in a separate debate with the hon. Gentleman, that is a different, although related, technology. It was funded in part by the Government and has produced interesting results. This is a matter for close consideration by officials and we will continue to reflect on the matter. If he wishes to write to me further, I would be delighted to take a letter.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): One of the core objectives of the draft industrial strategy is to rebalance the UK economy, with engineering, construction and manufacturing making a larger contribution to economic growth. Does the Minister agree that if we are to achieve that objective, we will need to invest in major infrastructure projects such as the tidal lagoon?

**Jesse Norman:** I absolutely share my right hon. Friend's view that major infrastructure investment is an important part, although only a part, of the wider overall investment that can be made in this country as part of the industrial strategy. He is right to suggest that those wider considerations must be balanced by a tempered assessment of value for money, and that is what we will be giving them.

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): With all due respect to the Minister, may I tell him that his Department simply not dragging its heels is not good enough? The Hendry report recommends that Ministers "secure the pathfinder project as swiftly as possible".

I can promise that he will have the full support of the Members on this side of the House for doing that, although I am unsure that he would have the same support from those behind him. Will he therefore press the Chancellor for an agreement on the Swansea tidal lagoon, to be announced in the March Budget?

**Jesse Norman:** I admire the hon. Gentleman's dexterity in turning three weeks into foot-dragging. Given his rabbinical scrutiny of the Hendry review, I shall simply remind him that it specifically asks the Government to give these issues careful consideration, and that is what we will be doing.

#### Leaving the EU: Research and Development (Scotland)

10. **Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): What steps he is taking to safeguard investment in research and development in Scotland as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU. [908487]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** As the Secretary of State has already said, the Government are supporting research and development throughout the UK. We protected the resource budget at the 2015 spending review and committed an extra £2 billion in the most recent autumn statement—the largest increase in science funding since 1979.

**Richard Arkless:** A hard Brexit will threaten Scotland's world-class university sector, and the price of the research development investment that we are discussing was a staggering €8.8 billion from 2007-2013. What representations

are this Department making to the Treasury and the Brexit Secretary to protect that vital investment?

**Joseph Johnson:** Scotland is a powerhouse for academic research, and we want to play to one of this country's great strengths, so we welcome the agreement to continue to collaborate with our European partners on major science and technology programmes in years to come. Britain will remain at the forefront of collective endeavours to improve and better understand the world in which we live.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The most important investment that we must safeguard is the people who work in science and research. What is the Minister doing to ensure that EU researchers in Scotland are sure of their place as we go through the Brexit process?

**Joseph Johnson:** The hon. Lady makes an important point. As the Prime Minister made clear in her speech the week before last, we greatly value the contribution that EU nationals make in our institutions. The Government have been exceptionally clear that during the negotiations we want to protect the status of EU nationals already living here. The only circumstances in which that would not be possible are if British citizens' rights in other EU member states were not protected in return.

#### Life Sciences

13. **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): What financial support his Department is providing to the life sciences sector. [908490]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** We invest £2 billion a year in health life sciences research through our research councils and the National Institute for Health Research. Through funding for the biomedical catalyst, we are helping businesses to bring that research to market. We announced in the new industrial strategy that Sir John Bell will be leading work on a strategy to make the UK the best place in the world to invest in life sciences.

**Kit Malthouse:** Alongside that welcome support, private investment will be critical to the success of the industry. Will the Minister outline what suggestions he might make in his Budget submission to the Chancellor to stimulate such investment?

**Joseph Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Access to finance is key to a dynamic life sciences sector in the UK. In November, the Prime Minister announced a review of patient capital to identify barriers to access to long-term finance for growing firms, looking at all aspects of the financial system. We look forward to the review's recommendations ahead of the autumn statement.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): The industrial strategy will have a major impact on speeding up Genomics England's ability to sequence the genome. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is working with the Department of Health to ensure that the Government's investment will be spent effectively to encourage greater productivity?

**Joseph Johnson:** The industrial strategy Green Paper highlights work on a new strategy for life sciences, bringing together the health system, industry and academia and potentially leading to an early sector deal. The accelerated access review sets out a vision of the NHS embracing innovation, and the Government will respond in due course.

### Local Economic Growth

14. **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to encourage businesses to support local economic growth. [908492]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** One of our most important reforms has been to devolve power and resources to local areas through city deals, devolution deals and growth deals, in which local businesses can shape the decisions most affecting them. The hon. Lady will have welcomed last week's announcement that half a billion pounds was devolved to northern local enterprise partnerships, including £130 million to Greater Manchester.

**Lucy Powell:** I welcomed most of the announcements in the industrial strategy last week, but the Secretary of State will appreciate that a local area strategy is required for key infrastructure issues such as skills and childcare. What conversations has he had with colleagues in the Department for Education and across local government about the meaningful devolution of skills, early years and education?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the needs of different places should be reflected in decisions that are made locally. Along with the centrality of skills and training, that is a big theme of the industrial strategy consultation, to which I hope she will respond. I look forward to her contribution.

**Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Business investment in science and technology is key to local economic growth and Britain's leadership of the fourth industrial revolution. Will the Secretary of State continue supporting LEPs to fund these key sectors and technologies?

**Greg Clark:** I will indeed. One of the big opportunities is to make sure that the excellence we have in science and research is married with local strengths so that we can have the products of that research, in manufacturing for example, as well as the discoveries themselves.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Northern Ireland has only one very small enterprise zone, which is up in Coleraine and has not really progressed. Can the Secretary of State give any support or assistance to the Northern Ireland Executive, when they are up and running again, for more enterprise zones within the Province?

**Greg Clark:** I have, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, conversations with Simon Hamilton, the Minister responsible in Northern Ireland. My colleagues and I are very happy to consider his suggestions and proposals when we meet him.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. The borough of Kettering has had one of the fastest

rates of business rate growth in the whole country in the last 10 years. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with local government to be fully funded by business rates from 2020, all local councils will have to get far closer to their local businesses in order for local economies to function as best they can?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, as a councillor, he knows how important it is that that very direct connection is made. It is one of the measures going through the House that I was proud to have proposed when I was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and it is something for which local government has long campaigned. I am delighted that it was this Conservative Government who were able to deliver it.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Bank lending is essential for local business success, and yesterday's HBOS convictions are a stark reminder of the way that smaller businesses were treated by some banks during the financial crisis. Does the Secretary of State accept that lending has fallen over the last year? What is he doing to give confidence in the banks, unlock support and increase lending?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw attention to the misbehaviour of the banks, especially with regard to small businesses, when they were inadequately supervised as a result of the destruction of the supervisory regime under the previous Labour Government. That has now been put on a much sounder footing. He will know that the lending opportunities for small businesses have been transformed, but the industrial strategy Green Paper is very clear that we want to make further opportunities available, particularly outside London and the south-east.

### Offshore Energy: Humber

15. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the offshore energy sector on the Humber region. [908493]

**The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd):** The UK is the world's largest market for offshore wind, and the Humber energy estuary is, in my hon. Friend's own words, "ideally positioned" to serve that sector. The Secretary of State and I saw that when we visited the new £310 million Siemens turbine blade factory, which has created more than 1,000 very valuable new jobs in the area.

**Martin Vickers:** This afternoon the Humber local enterprise partnership and Humber MPs are staging a showcase event to highlight the assets of the energy estuary. Can the Minister assure business leaders that the Government will continue to support the offshore centre, which is based in northern Lincolnshire, and the wider Humber region? Will he or one of his colleagues find time to visit the event this afternoon?

**Mr Hurd:** Yes to the event, and yes to the assurance that my hon. Friend seeks about continued support. On top of the growth deal, the city deal and the enterprise zone programme, he will be well aware of the very significant Government commitment to future contract

for difference auctions worth £730 million for less mature renewable technologies, including offshore wind. I hope he welcomes that.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps are the Government taking to ensure the highest possible UK content in the steel used to build the energy infrastructure in the Humber?

**Mr Hurd:** That is an extremely important point, and it is part of our calculation of the return on the investment made by the British taxpayer. Good progress is being made, and analysis shows that aggregated lifetime UK content in operating windfarms is 43%, against a track target of around 50%, and the proportion is higher for the value of operations and maintenance contracts, which run at about 70% of value at the moment. This will be a key area of our focus as we go forward with the industrial strategy.

#### Access to Finance

16. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on improving access to finance for businesses. [908494]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had discussions with the Chancellor on building the Government's industrial strategy, which includes ensuring that businesses can access the finance they need. We already help businesses through the business finance and support finder on gov.uk, and we recently launched the finance platforms service, which offers small and medium-sized enterprises that have had finance rejected by the large banks the option of a referral to alternative finance providers.

**Chris Davies:** With many new online alternative finance companies springing up across the UK, what is my hon. Friend doing, first, to ensure that our small and medium-sized enterprises know about these alternative ways of accessing finance, and, secondly, to give them the confidence to borrow from such organisations?

**Margot James:** The British Business Bank has created the business finance guide, which is widely distributed and offers comprehensive information about the financing options available to businesses, including alternative sources of finance. The Financial Conduct Authority regulates peer-to-peer lending platforms and is currently reviewing its regulatory regime to ensure that it is robust and up to date.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of bank closures in town centres on the availability of business finance, to ensure that those such as my local one in Holywell, which is potentially losing three banks this year, will still have access to business finance and will still be positive town centres?

**Margot James:** The impact of bank closures is, to some extent, ameliorated by the Post Office's announcement a few weeks ago that it will be enabling both personal and SME banking customers to have a massive increase in face-to-face banking services across the country.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mike Freer. He is not here. We will take the last question on the condition that we have a reasonably short, single sentence supplementary, as I want to move on to the main business promptly today. If it is a long question, we will not bother.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) I will do my best.

**Mr Speaker:** A single short sentence is required.

#### Medical Research

19. **Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote medical research. [908497]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** This year the Medical Research Council will spend £655 million on world-class research. Our commitment to the future of the UK as a world leader in biomedical research is unwavering. For example, in November, Her Majesty the Queen opened the Francis Crick Institute, and we will continue to invest in this kind of excellence throughout this Parliament.

**Mrs Gillan:** Autism is the most expensive medical condition in the UK, costing the economy more than £32 billion a year, according to the London School of Economics, yet we spend hardly anything on autism research compared with what we spend on research into cancer, heart disease and stroke, which cost the economy less. What can the Minister do to encourage more spending on autism research, which is so vital to people in this country?

**Joseph Johnson:** Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, the MRC spent £13.3 million on autism research, and it always welcomes high-quality applications for support on any aspect of human health. Such applications are subject to peer review and are judged in open competition. The Department of Health, through the National Institute for Health Research, also funds research in this area, and the MRC's centre for neurodevelopmental disorders at King's College London opened recently, in November.

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) can always have her question framed and put up on the wall in a suitable part of her home, of her own choosing.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [908463] **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** Since our last questions, with the Prime Minister my ministerial team and I have launched our industrial strategy Green Paper, part of a cross-Government plan to build an economy that works for everyone. Efforts to secure global investment in British enterprise and innovation continue to meet with success, with the most recent example being the £115 million Novo Nordisk investment in Oxford, which is a further vote of confidence in Britain as a place to do both

business and science. Today we launch the next energy capacity market auction. Last month, I signed a memorandum of co-operation with the Government of Japan on civil nuclear activities, and on Thursday I announced that we have secured a second mission to space for Major Tim Peake.

**David Morris:** As always, my right hon. Friend has been extraordinarily busy, but may I ask my extraordinarily busy right hon. Friend to turn his attention to Morecambe and Lunesdale, as we now have a new link road going straight to the Heysham port and we would like an enterprise zone? Will he help me to get an enterprise zone?

**Greg Clark:** I am never too busy for Morecambe and Lunesdale, and I know what a passionate campaigner my hon. Friend has been for the business prospects in his area. If I may, I will talk to the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse, who has responsibility for enterprise zones—I am sure he will be happy to have a meeting with my hon. Friend.

**Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab):** The Secretary of State's plan to impose arbitrary cuts on the pensions of 16,000 nuclear energy workers, 7,000 of them in Copeland, threatens industrial relations in a key sector. I urge him to take the opportunity, at this week's meeting with trade unions, to end his attack on workers who power our country and abandon the raid on their pensions before the industry is plunged into chaos.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman):** I met the unions last week, and we had some constructive, although undoubtedly robust, conversations. The discussion continues and we hope it will end constructively.

T4. [908466] **Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** What discussions has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had with representatives of industry, particularly the steel industry, about the UK's leaving the European Union?

**Greg Clark:** As my hon. Friend would expect, my colleagues meet representatives of all kinds of businesses, both in the UK and those looking to invest here. We are clear, as the Prime Minister has been, that we intend to pursue our negotiations to secure the best possible access to the single market so that the manifest advantages of the UK continue to be available to companies, here, now and in future.

T2. [908464] **Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op):** European Commission state aid approval for the steel industry is still not in place. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that compensation under the energy industrial package will be provided by the UK Government until the exemption is finally introduced?

**The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd):** Of course it will continue. We are in discussions about the mechanics of that, as part of a broader conversation that the Secretary of State and I are having with senior management of the steel industry and trade unions about securing a sustainable future for the industry.

T7. [908469] **Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con):** The Government's recent industrial strategy Green Paper is to be warmly welcomed. I have spoken to the vice-chancellor of Loughborough University, and we see lots of opportunities for the Loughborough constituency, the university, the college and local industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has visited Loughborough; perhaps I can tempt him to come again to hear about those opportunities, or could we meet in London?

**Greg Clark:** I commend Loughborough University and its vice-chancellor, Robert Allison. It is a fantastic example of an excellent academic institution that makes a big impact locally. I am always happy to meet my right hon. Friend and the leadership of that fine university.

T3. [908465] **Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP):** The removal of the renewables obligation and the decimation of the feed-in tariff have had a huge negative impact on my constituency, where renewables are the one tangible business area we have that we can grow and that offers highly paid jobs. One year on from those draconian measures, what reassessment has been made of the policy's effectiveness?

**Mr Hurd:** This country and this Government are on track to invest in excess of £8 billion a year by 2020 in continuing the transition to a clean energy system. We are talking about a low-carbon economy that is generating, at the last count, at least 450,000 jobs. As I made clear in an earlier announcement, there are new commitments to contract for difference auctions for less mature renewable technologies, so the Government's commitment to clean energy is not in doubt.

T8. [908470] **Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con):** May I again welcome the first two pillars of the proposed industrial strategy: investment in science and developing skills? Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how the work of the Science and Technology Committee can act as a road map in delivering the Government's aims?

**Greg Clark:** I very much hope that my hon. Friend's Committee will engage with the consultation. If we are to have a strategy that endures, it is important that it takes into account the views of all those on both sides of the House with an interest in securing our economic prosperity and future scientific excellence.

T5. [908467] **Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab):** It is estimated that an ambitious approach to the circular economy could create half a million new jobs. Cities such as Bristol would be very well placed to take advantage of that. It is disappointing that there is little mention of resource efficiency, low-carbon growth and sustainability in the industrial strategy. Can the Government reassure me that they are taking this seriously?

**Mr Hurd:** Yes I can, and I take a strong personal interest in those matters. The hon. Lady says they are not mentioned in the industrial strategy, but they are. One of the clear pillars of the industrial strategy is a commitment to clean growth, within which are some explicit references to our desire to explore the opportunities attached to higher resource and energy productivity.

T9. [908471] **Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): It is 100 years since the destruction of Hallsands village following an act of environmental destruction and vandalism that saw the removal of protective shingle from the shoreline. Communities around our entire coast, including in Start Bay, face an even greater threat from climate change. Will the Minister assure me that he will protect us from an act of environmental vandalism—withdrawal from the Paris agreement?

**Mr Hurd:** As the Prime Minister said in Prime Minister's questions last week, this country is fully committed to the Paris climate change agreement—as are all the countries that endorsed the Marrakech proclamation—and we hope that all parties will continue to ensure that it is put into practice.

T6. [908468] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): Since the EU referendum, the depreciation of sterling has boosted British manufacturing and exports, but, as we are leaving the EU, will the Government now start to use public procurement and necessary state aid to support the vital expansion of our industries and the promotion of import substitution?

**Greg Clark:** We want British business and British industry to compete on the basis that they are price-competitive. There are opportunities that come from being outside some of the bureaucracy, which affects small businesses in particular when it comes to public procurement, and those are opportunities that we will be able to take.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr David Nuttall. I thought that he was interested in this question. Has his appetite diminished? [*Interruption.*] No? Go on. Get in there, man.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): I had not planned to stand for topical questions, but may I urge my right hon. Friend not to be swayed by the arguments from the Opposition to spend a specific amount of our GDP on research for scientific projects? If the private sector is unwilling to fund those projects, we should ask serious questions about whether the public sector and my hardworking taxpayers should be asked to foot the bill.

**Greg Clark:** Happily, the private sector—British business—is an enthusiastic and increasing supporter of investment in science and research. Sometimes that is done jointly with important publicly funded institutions such as our universities, and that is one of our strengths as an economy.

**Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): In November, the Secretary of State hauled energy companies into his Department to put pressure on them regarding claims that they were generating excess profits. This morning, at the Select Committee, Which? told us that energy companies are dismal when it comes to customer service and prices. Does he agree with that assessment, and will he outline to the House what progress has been made to get a better deal for energy customers since that meeting in November?

**Greg Clark:** Yes. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The Competition and Markets Authority report identified a huge detriment that consumers were facing. There has been some limited response from the energy

companies. For example, they have deleted some of their more abusive tariffs, but there is further to go, and we will be making a response to the CMA report in the days ahead.

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): It has been recently announced that the strategy for the midlands engine for growth will be announced soon. The midlands engine is vital for business in Derby and the midlands, so may I urge the Secretary of State to consider it sooner rather than later?

**Greg Clark:** The midlands engine is a very important part of the strengthening of the economy, and there is real momentum there. My hon. Friend can look forward to some very important announcements that will be made imminently.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Last week, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), said that there had clearly been instances of the pubs code being flouted and that Members should bring such things to her attention. I have a case in her own constituency to bring to her attention, which also shows that the adjudicator is not doing his job. May we discuss this matter please?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):** I am very happy to discuss the case in my own constituency with the hon. Gentleman, but the Pubs Code Adjudicator is doing a good job. His line of inquiry has received 435 inquiries to date and 121 referrals for arbitration, but I will discuss the problem with the hon. Gentleman.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The industrial strategy makes a clear commitment that future rounds of infrastructure investment will take into account the balance of spending per head as between different regions. On the basis that there is a 60% imbalance between London and the rest of the country at the moment, what balance would the Secretary of State like to see going ahead?

**Greg Clark:** I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution to the consultation. We are very clear that we need to see infrastructure investment in all parts of the country. It is one reason why we have created institutions such as Transport for the North to be able to take those decisions locally.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): The Government's industrial strategy has sector deals for a number of sectors, which is welcome. Given the vital cross-cutting foundational nature of the steel industry, will the Minister now commit to a sector deal for steel?

**Greg Clark:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have already been having discussions with the steel industry with precisely that purpose in mind.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We come now to the ten-minute rule motion. The hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) will be pleased that she has such an interested, large and expectant audience.

## Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence against Women)

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

12.30 pm

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the aggravated murder of, and aggravated domestic violence against, women, who are citizens of the United Kingdom, outside the United Kingdom; to prohibit the use of the term honour killing in official publications; to require the Government to arrange for, and meet from public funds the costs of, the repatriation of the bodies of female citizens of the United Kingdom who are victims of aggravated murder outside the United Kingdom and the provision of assistance to female citizens of the United Kingdom who are victims of aggravated domestic violence outside the United Kingdom in order to enable them to return to the United Kingdom; to provide for the prosecution in the United Kingdom in certain circumstances of citizens of the United Kingdom who commit the aggravated murder of, or threaten or incite domestic violence against, women, who are citizens of the United Kingdom, outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Language matters. The use of the term “honour” to describe a violent criminal act—sometimes committed against a man, but more often against a woman—can be explained only as a means of self-justification for the perpetrator. It diminishes the victim and provides a convenient excuse for what in our society we should accurately and simply call murder, rape, abuse or enslavement. I want us in this House to send a clear message that the excuses end here. Even more than that, the term assumes that violence, in particular against women, is culturally sensitive—a sensitivity that allows the perpetrator to use further coercion to prevent the victim from seeking help and to intimidate the agencies of the state to stop them pursuing and prosecuting these violent crimes. The principles that every victim should be treated equally and with dignity and that our law enforcement agencies should respond to every crime with equal vigour are threatened when a separate set of cultural norms and practices are accepted for some victims of domestic violence.

We have one law in our country—one law that applies to everyone, regardless of their heritage or faith. The Bill builds on the progress already made by the strategies on ending violence against women and girls, tackling female genital mutilation and forced marriage; by coercive control laws; and by the brave work done by our Prime Minister to introduce the Modern Slavery Act 2015. I want to place on the record my special thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary, and their teams, for their continued support and time.

Between 2010 and 2015, 11,000 incidents of crime to which the term “honour” was applied were recorded in the UK. During their constituency duties, Members will have encountered cases in which the police and other agencies, including the Crown Prosecution Service, have been reluctant to tackle domestic violence in minority communities for fear of being accused of racism or of provoking community unrest. Indeed, the CPS has acknowledged that it needs to improve its understanding of and response and support to victims—victims such

as Sarbjit. Sarbjit was abused throughout her marriage. She was battered by her husband and treated as a domestic servant. She was terrorised and went to bed not knowing whether she would be alive the next day. She was told that the honour of her family would be at stake if she complained and that the police would just treat her as a number. Sarbjit told me that she did not feel alive, but nor was she dead. When she summoned up the courage, she called Crimestoppers as well as the police. She risked her life in reaching out. But after statements were taken, she was returned home to her abusers because it was just a “cultural misunderstanding”: shockingly, the evidence of her abusers was believed over hers. Sarbjit was reduced to going to a temple, falling to her knees and begging for help from community leaders. It was a desperate act from a desperate woman. She was sent home again and told to think of her family’s honour. She was trapped and, once she had been let down by the authorities she trusted to protect her, she had nowhere to turn.

Fozia’s husband beat her and secured a second wife. Like many domestic violence victims, she was nervous about asking for help. She told me that when she did call the police—three times—she was treated with indifference as the situation was dealt with as a community issue and an honour crime, not as bigamy and assault as she had hoped. She wanted equal treatment and support under our law, not culturally appropriate interventions.

In what way does the term “honour” describe these crimes, except as the pathetic self-justification of the perpetrator? It is a term used by those who see women as the property of men and who think women’s decisions, lives and loves belong to the family, community or religious institution. This Bill commits us to describing such crimes as they really are and being clear to the police, local authorities, community leaders, the CPS and victims themselves that cultural and religious sensitivities are not a barrier to justice.

We have no record of how many British women are taken overseas by family members to be abused or killed. However, we know that when it happens, their assailants believe that their crimes are beyond the reach of British justice. The Bill would change that, extending the provisions of the Modern Slavery Act, so that if someone is taken from the UK to anywhere in the world to be exploited, the offence can be investigated in the UK because the planning and part of the trafficking took place here.

Seeta Kaur was born in the UK, and she died in India. She was subject to domestic violence throughout her marriage, was terrorised by her in-laws and was told to give her eldest son to her childless brother-in-law in India. She was coerced into travelling to India and was forced to return home without her son. Seeta would beg until she was reunited with him. Her husband and his family saw this as a question of honour. There is no official confirmation as to the cause of Seeta’s death. Her husband said it was a heart attack, but her family bore witness to bruising around her neck and upper chest, and intended to bring her body home. Before they could, Seeta was cremated by her husband in the dead of night. While in shock and grieving, Seeta’s family reported her death as suspicious to the Indian police, but they saw it as a family matter and tried to reconcile the families, even offering the return of Seeta’s

[Nusrat Ghani]

children—British citizens—in exchange for dropping the murder allegation. When that did not work, the case was simply closed.

The Bill extends extraterritorial jurisdiction to domestic violence. I hope it will re-emphasise our responsibility to investigate murder aggravated by domestic violence. At present, victims do not have the same level of protection, and there is not the same commitment to investigate, prosecute or provide desperately needed support to victims and families. Crucially, the Bill would end the near impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of domestic violence who often, with the complicity of foreign states, seek to escape justice by taking women abroad so they can continue committing their crimes. In this country, we make no distinction based on faith, heritage or background. There can be no exceptions to equality of treatment before the law or to the pursuit of justice. The words we use and the actions we take must reflect the values that we hold dear.

12.39 pm

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I am afraid that, for reasons that I will set out, I oppose this Bill as it is currently framed. For the benefit of the morons on Twitter, and for some in this House, I should make it clear from the start that obviously, along with everybody else, I oppose women suffering from honour-based violence, but it seems that I am the only one in this House at the moment who equally opposes honour-based violence against men too.

I certainly commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) for her wish to tackle the politically correct culture that sometimes surrounds certain cultures in this country and which can be very damaging to those caught up in them. I attended a meeting organised by Baroness Cox where three very brave Muslim women explained how they had been very badly treated by sharia courts. Unfortunately, despite all the people here who claim to be concerned about women, I was the only Member of the House of Commons at that meeting, so concerned were people about the violence that those women had faced through judgments from sharia courts.

This Bill deals, quite rightly, with dangerous political correctness, as it does not get any more serious than murder. I completely agree with my hon. Friend about the term “honour killing”—there is nothing honourable about murdering someone. I would encourage her to keep making this point, as even without legislation she could make some progress. I am afraid, however, that while tackling one element of political correctness, she has opened up another politically correct can of worms.

The main reason I oppose this Bill is that it relates only to female victims and not all victims. I fear that we are going to have a rerun of the debate on the Istanbul convention that we had not so long ago in this House. We cannot let—[*Interruption.*] I know that people do not like any other opinions being expressed, but this is a Parliament; this is a democracy. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members will have noticed that I was keen to move on from Question Time on time today, not least because of the number of would-be

contributors to the main Second Reading debate. I do not want matters to be delayed, but the hon. Gentleman must be heard.

**Philip Davies:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

We cannot let this trend of having laws that are unjustifiably aimed at dealing with just one gender take hold, and I will continue to oppose all Bills and motions that do that. Why do we need to have just females mentioned in this Bill? Why can it not be for all victims of these terrible crimes? We do not have an offence of female murder or male murder—we just have murder. There are more male victims of murder in the UK than female victims of murder. If I introduced a Bill that said we are only going to care about the families of the male victims because there are more of them, I suspect that most of the Opposition Members who are complaining would be up in arms about such a Bill that focused only on the male victims of murder because they are in the majority—and the same should apply here. Yes, of course women are far more likely to be the victims of honour-based crimes than men, but they are not exclusively the victims of these crimes. As far as I am concerned, all these things are just as bad as each other.

I am no expert, but I am told that *karo-kari*, which is the Pakistani term for so-called honour killing, literally means “adulterer” and “adulteress”. These terms have wider definitions than their literal ones to cover all immoral behaviour, and it is quite clear that they cover both sexes and are therefore not gender specific.

In 2007-08, the Home Affairs Committee said that men are also victims of honour-based violence. In January 2015, the Henry Jackson Society published a report on so-called honour killings, where it said that

“men are also victims of ‘honour’ killings. In the cases of male victims reported in the media over the past five years, the perpetrators usually included the families of a current or expartner”.

It went on to confirm that in the UK there were 22 female victims, but seven male victims too. A report by the Government’s Forced Marriage Unit says:

“In 2015, 980 cases...involved female victims and 240...involved male victims. This highlights that men can also be forced into marriage.”

The Crown Prosecution Service report, “Violence Against Women and Girls”, says that

“where gender was recorded, female victims accounted for” about 76%

“and male victims were”

about 24%.

This means that nearly a quarter of all the victims of these crimes are men. That is not an insignificant number, and it is not something that we should ignore. I understand that this is particularly an issue for gay men, but they would certainly not be included under the provisions of the Bill.

As we are talking about crimes taking place outside this country, we ought to look at the victims of crime over there. The Pakistani Human Rights Commission, which monitors reports of such crimes, came to the conclusion that about a quarter of victims in Pakistan were men. People might want to bear it in mind that *The Guardian* has reported cases of male killings. The newspaper cited the case of Ahmed Bashir, who died after he was attacked with a sword and a machete in the garden of his west London home. It is very sad that the Opposition do not care about Ahmed Bashir, who was

killed with a machete in his own home; it seems that that does not count because he happens to be a man. What kind of Parliament have we become? *The Telegraph* ran a piece that highlighted the case of another male victim of an honour-based killing. Phyllis Chesler, emerita professor of psychology at Richmond College of the City University of New York, has also written about how male victims are included in honour-based crimes.

There are other issues with this Bill, which I do not have time to go into now, but I believe that its discriminatory premise is wrong. Not all victims are female, and not all offenders are male. We should introduce gender-neutral legislation that is designed to help all victims of crime, whether they be men or women, and to punish all offenders responsible for such crimes, whether those offenders be men or women. [*Interruption.*] People are saying that that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden said, but I am looking at the annunciator screen, which reads: “Crime (Aggravated Murder of and Violence against Women)”. There is no mention of men. It is no good saying that this Bill includes men; it does not. That is there on the screen for hon. Members to see, if they cannot hear what is happening. They clearly have not read the Bill. Some people will ask, “Why not support something that might help somebody, if not everybody?” I say, “Why not help everybody from the start?” What possible reason is there for not including men and women in the terms of the Bill?

I end where I started. Of course, we all oppose women suffering from honour-based violence, but I, for one, equally oppose honour-based violence against men. To have a strategy for dealing with one but not the other is, in my opinion, not acceptable and not justifiable.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Nusrat Ghani, Mr David Burrowes, Michael Gove, Yvette Cooper, Tim Loughton, Robert Jenrick, John Mann, Naz Shah, Craig Whittaker, James Berry, Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil and Stuart C. McDonald present the Bill.

Nusrat Ghani accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill to be read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 129).*

**Philip Davies:** I will be here.

**Mr Speaker:** The sedentary observation of the hon. Member for Shipley that he will be here was, if I may say so, superfluous. None of us doubted it for a moment.

## European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill

[*Relevant document: The First Report from the Committee on Exiting the European Union, The process for exiting the European Union and the Government’s negotiating objectives, HC 815.*]

*Second Reading*

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Mr Angus Robertson.

No fewer than 99 Back Benchers are seeking to catch my eye today, without regard to how many might seek to contribute tomorrow. There will have to be a tough time limit on Back Benchers, the severity of which will depend on the level of consideration shown by Front Benchers, so there is of course no pressure.

12.50 pm

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis):** I beg to move, that the Bill be now read a Second time.

Given your admonishment, Mr Speaker, and indeed the state of my voice, I give the House warning that I will not take very many interventions. I will take some, but not my normal two dozen.

The Bill responds directly to the Supreme Court judgment of 24 January, and seeks to honour the commitment the Government gave to respect the outcome of the referendum held on 23 June 2016. It is not a Bill about whether the UK should leave the European Union or, indeed, about how it should do so; it is simply about Parliament empowering the Government to implement a decision already made—a point of no return already passed. We asked the people of the UK whether they wanted to leave the European Union, and they decided they did. At the core of this Bill lies a very simple question: do we trust the people or not? The democratic mandate is clear: the electorate voted for a Government to give them a referendum. Parliament voted to hold the referendum, the people voted in that referendum, and we are now honouring the result of that referendum, as we said we would.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** Not at the moment.

This is the most straightforward possible Bill necessary to enact that referendum result and respect the Supreme Court’s judgment. Indeed, the House of Commons has already overwhelmingly passed a motion to support the triggering of article 50 by 31 March. We will respect the will of the people and implement their decision by 31 March.

Clause 1(1) simply confers on the Prime Minister the power to notify, under article 50 of the treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom’s intention to withdraw from the European Union. Clause 1(2) is included to make it clear that the power to trigger article 50 may be conferred on the Prime Minister regardless of any restrictions in other legislation, including the European Communities Act 1972. Together, these clear and succinct powers will allow the Prime Minister to begin the process of withdrawal from the European Union, respecting

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the decision of the Supreme Court. This is just the beginning—the beginning of a process to ensure that the decision made by the people last June is honoured.

**Philip Davies:** Given that triggering article 50 is an inevitable consequence of the result of the referendum, does the Secretary of State agree that although it may be honourable for MPs who voted against having a referendum in the first place to vote against triggering article 50—that would be entirely consistent—it would be entirely unacceptable for those who voted to put this matter to a referendum to try to renege on the result of that referendum?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend makes his point in his own inimitable way. As he knows, I always take the view that people's votes in this House are a matter for their own honour and their own beliefs.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make a little bit of progress, and I will then give way to him.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the explanatory notes to the Bill, which set out the application of the Bill to Euratom. The Bill also gives the Prime Minister the power to start the process to leave Euratom. The Bill makes it clear that in invoking article 50, we will be leaving Euratom, the agency established by treaty to ensure co-operation on nuclear matters, as well as leaving the European Union. This is because, although Euratom was established in a treaty separate from the EU agreements and treaties, it uses the same institutions as the European Union, including the European Court of Justice. The European Union (Amendment) Act 2008 makes it clear that in UK law membership of the European Union includes Euratom. That is why article 50 applies to both the European Union and to Euratom.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): I received an email yesterday from Professor John Wheeler, the head of physics at Oxford University, who had the very dubious pleasure of being my tutor for four years in the mid-1990s. He is concerned about the implications for his fusion research programme of our leaving Euratom. Is there any way in which we could postpone leaving Euratom by a year or two, and if that is not possible, what assurance will the Secretary of State give Professor Wheeler and his colleagues?

**Mr Davis:** The first thing I would say to my hon. Friend is that there is a two-year timetable, so we are still two years out from this. The Prime Minister has also said very clearly in her industrial strategy and in her speech on Brexit that we intend to support the scientific community and to build as much support for it as we can. When we engage in negotiations after March, we will negotiate with the European Union with the aim of creating a mechanism that will allow the research to go on.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not want to have to keep saying this, because I know it is very tedious. I know that the Secretary of State is a most attentive Minister,

but may I appeal to him not to keep turning around and looking at people behind him? It is incredibly frustrating for the House. I know that is the natural temptation. [Interruption.] I am sure that he has made a very valid point, but it suffered from the disadvantage that I could not hear it.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Alex Salmond:** The question from the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) is an illustration of the fact that the consequences of the Bill go much further than the Secretary of State is telling us. Is not the reason why the Government find themselves in a position of such abasement to President Trump that they have decided to abandon the high ground of the single marketplace, without so much as a negotiating word being spoken? That is why they are desperate to do a deal with anybody on any terms at any time. Why did the Secretary of State lead this country into a position of such weakness?

**Mr Davis:** That is almost exactly the opposite of the case. Since the right hon. Gentleman picks up on Euratom, let me make the point in rather more elaborate detail. Euratom passes to its constituent countries the regulations, rules and supervision that it inherits, as it were, from the International Atomic Energy Agency, of which we are still a member. When we come to negotiate with the European Union on this matter, if it is not possible to come to a conclusion involving some sort of relationship with Euratom, we will no doubt be able to reach one with the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is possibly the most respectable international body in the world. I am afraid he is wrong on that.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** No.

Our aims are clear: we will maintain the closest possible nuclear co-operation with the European Union. That relationship could take a number of different forms, and it will of course be subject to negotiations that will start after we have notified.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Brexit affords huge opportunities for international trade for global Britain, and part of that global trade is with the single European market. Although there may be access to the full market—hybrid access—will the Secretary of State confirm that anything that introduces new taxes, tariffs or duties on British goods is not in our national economic interests?

**Mr Davis:** The answer to that intervention is yes.

**John Woodcock:** May I urge the Secretary of State and the Government to keep an open mind on Euratom? There is a danger that years of uncertainty will put at risk the 21,000 new jobs slated to come in as part of the Moorside development, as well as many others across the UK?

**Mr Davis:** The hon. Gentleman made his point very well, and I take it absolutely. He is right that a lot of jobs are involved, as are our standing in the scientific community and our international reputation, as well as individual projects, such as the Joint European Torus project and ITER—the international thermonuclear experimental reactor—all of which we will seek to preserve. We will have the most open mind possible. The difficulty we face is of course that decisions are made by unanimity under the Euratom treaty, so we essentially have to win over the entire group. We will set out to do that, and we will do it with the same aims that he has described. Absolutely, yes: I give him my word on that matter.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** No, not for the moment.

The Prime Minister set out a bold and ambitious vision for the UK, outlining our key negotiating objectives as we move to establish a comprehensive new partnership with the European Union. This will be a partnership in the best interests of the whole of the United Kingdom, and we will continue to work with the devolved Administrations to make sure that the voices of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to be heard throughout the negotiation process. I will come back to this point in more detail, so, if I may, I will take interventions on it a little later.

I made a statement to this House on 17 January about the negotiations ahead of us and I do not propose to repeat it, save to say that our aim is to take this opportunity for the United Kingdom to emerge from this period of change stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before. I also set out our 12 objectives for those negotiations. They are: to deliver certainty and clarity where we can; to take control of our own laws; to protect and strengthen the Union; to maintain the common travel area with the Republic of Ireland; to control immigration; to protect the rights of EU nationals in the UK and UK nationals in the European Union; to protect workers' rights; to allow free trade with European markets; to forge new trade deals with other countries; to boost science and innovation; to protect and enhance co-operation over crime, terrorism and security; and to make our exit smooth and orderly. In due course, the Government will publish our plan for exit in a White Paper in this House and in the other place. *[Interruption.]* I hear the normal, noisy shouts from the shadow Foreign Secretary asking when. I will say to her exactly what I said to her in my statement last week: as soon as is reasonably possible. It is very hard to do it any faster than that.

On 17 January, the Prime Minister also made it clear that this House and the other place will have a vote on the deal the Government negotiate with the EU before it comes into force. Ahead of that, Parliament will have a key role in scrutinising and shaping the decisions made through debate in both Houses, and the work of Select Committees, including the Exiting the European Union Committee, whose Chair, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), is in his place.

Ministers will continue to provide regular updates to Parliament. Further, since our proposal is to shift the entire *acquis communautaire*—the body of EU law—into

UK law at the point this country leaves the EU, it will be for Parliament to determine any changes to our domestic legislation in the national interest. But as the Prime Minister said, to disclose all the details as we negotiate is not in the best interests of this country. Indeed, I have said all along that we will lay out as much detail of our strategy as possible, subject to the caveat that it does not damage our negotiating position. This approach has been endorsed by the House a number of times.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for being generous with his time. Does he not agree that there is no such thing as hard Brexit or soft Brexit? There is just Brexit, and we are going to make a success of it.

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. I said last week that I view the terms hard Brexit and soft Brexit as propaganda.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the people need to be better informed about the impact of Brexit? At what point are the Government going to publish their analysis of the impact on jobs of our leaving the single market?

**Mr Davis:** The assertions that people like the right hon. Gentleman made in the run-up to the referendum have turned out to be universally untrue so far, so I do not think he is in a position to lecture us on this matter.

I turn now to the reasoned amendment tabled by the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). As I have already said, the Bill simply seeks to deliver the outcome of the referendum, a decision the people of the UK have already made. They will view dimly any attempt to halt its progress. The Supreme Court's judgment last week made it clear that foreign affairs are reserved to the UK Government. The devolved legislatures do not have a veto on the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union. However, that does not mean we have not paid a great deal of attention to them. We have consistently engaged with the devolved Administrations through the Joint Ministerial Committee on European Negotiations and the Joint Ministerial Committee plenary. The latter met yesterday in Cardiff, and the meeting was attended by the First Ministers of all the devolved Administrations. In addition, and independent of those meetings, I have had bilateral meetings with the devolved Administrations, and there have been 79 official-level meetings to discuss the interests of each of the devolved Administrations.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Does he not accept that the people of Scotland voted to remain within the European Union, and that respect has to be shown to the Scottish people, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, which empowers the Government to act in our interests? Why will he not negotiate to allow Scotland to remain with access to the single market as we demand?

**Mr Davis:** I remind the hon. Gentleman that there was another referendum a little while ago, which was about the people of Scotland deciding to stay within the United Kingdom. That is what they are doing and that is what we expect them to continue to do.

[Mr David Davis]

The Prime Minister has committed to bring forward a White Paper setting out the Government's plan and I confirm that it will be published in the near future. Guaranteeing UK citizens' rights in the EU, and EU citizens' rights in the UK, is one of the objectives set out by the Prime Minister. We have been, and remain, ready to reach such a deal now—now—if other countries agree.

Finally, there has been continual parliamentary scrutiny of the Government on this process: I have made five oral statements in the House of Commons; there have been more than 10 debates, including four in Government time; and over 30 Select Committee inquiries. We will of course continue to support Parliament in its scrutiny role as we reach the negotiating stage.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): Does the Secretary of State accept that Northern Ireland voted to stay in the European Union? In fact, my constituency voted 70%, on a 70% turnout, to remain. Does he accept that we do not have a devolved Administration at the moment? Does he have any plans to recognise the situation in Northern Ireland and the damage that has already been done to the Northern Ireland economy, in particular our agricultural economy?

**Mr Davis:** The position of Northern Ireland, the peace process and all related issues were obviously at the forefront of the Prime Minister's mind when she went there as one of her first visits as Prime Minister. It will be at the forefront of my mind, which is why we have, without any qualification whatever, guaranteed the retention of the common travel area. On continuing representation, although there is no Executive individual Ministers stay in place, as is the norm with Governments during election times. I wrote to the Executive a week or so ago asking them to send a representative to each of the Joint Ministerial Committee meetings. They have done so, and they have made a serious and significant contribution to the meetings. We are taking very seriously the analysis they have provided of industries in Northern Ireland, including special issues such as the single Irish energy market. They are the sorts of issues that we have put front and centre in the list of negotiating points to deal with. The hon. Gentleman may absolutely take it as read that we take protecting Northern Ireland very seriously.

We have been clear that there must be no attempts to remain inside the EU, no attempts to re-join it through the back door, and no second referendum. The country voted to leave the European Union and it is the duty of the Government to make sure we do just that.

Finally, we remain committed to the timetable set out by the Prime Minister to trigger article 50 no later than 31 March. We will provide plenty of time for debate and scrutiny of the Bill, but it is equally vital that right hon. and hon. Members move swiftly to adopt this proposed legislation, in keeping with the Prime Minister's timetable for triggering article 50 by the end of March. The House voted in favour of that timetable in December, and it is providing certainty both at home and in the European Union.

I conclude by saying this: the eyes of the nation are on this Chamber as we consider the Bill. For many years, there has been a creeping sense in the country—and

not just in this country—that politicians say one thing and then do another. We voted to give the people the chance to determine our future in a referendum. Now we must honour our side of the agreement: to vote to deliver on the result. So, we are considering that very simple question: do we trust the people or not? For generations, my party has done so. Now that question is before every Member of this House. The Bill provides the power for the Prime Minister to begin that process and honour the decision made by the people of the United Kingdom on 23 June last year. I commend it to the House. Trust the people.

1.9 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): We have before us a short and relatively simple Bill, but, for the Labour party, this is a very difficult Bill. [Laughter.] I ask that hon. Members be courteous as I try to set out the position of the Labour party in what are very difficult circumstances. I will try to set that out clearly, and I expect people to be courteous.

We are a fiercely internationalist party. We are a pro-European party. We believe that through our alliances we achieve more together than we do alone. We believe in international co-operation and collaboration. We believe in the international rule of law. These beliefs will never change. That is why we campaigned to stay in the EU. We recognise that the EU is our major trading partner and that the single market and customs union have benefited UK businesses and our economy for many years. We recognise more widely the benefits of collaborative working across the EU in fields of research, medicine, technology, education, arts and farming. We also recognise the role that the EU plays in tackling common threats, such as climate change and serious organised crime. We share values and identity with the EU.

But we failed to persuade. We lost the referendum. Yes, the result was close. Yes, there were lies and half-truths—none worse than the false promise of an extra £350 million a week for the NHS. Yes, technically the referendum is not legally binding. But the result was not technical; it was deeply political, and politically the notion that the referendum was merely a consultation exercise to inform Parliament holds no water. When I was imploring people up and down the country to vote in the referendum and to vote to remain, I told them that their vote really mattered and that a decision was going to be made. I was not inviting them to express a view.

Although we are fiercely internationalist and fiercely pro-European, we in the Labour party are, above all, democrats. Had the outcome been to remain, we would have expected the result to be honoured, and that cuts both ways. A decision was made on 23 June last year to leave the EU. Two thirds of Labour MPs represent constituencies that voted to leave; one third represent constituencies that voted to remain. This is obviously a difficult decision. I wish the result had gone the other way—I campaigned passionately for that—but as democrats we in the Labour party have to accept the result. It follows that the Prime Minister should not be blocked from starting the article 50 negotiations.

That does not mean, however, that the Prime Minister can do as she likes without restraint from the House—quite the opposite: she is accountable to the House, and that

accountability will be vital on the uncertain journey that lies ahead. She fought to prevent the House from having a vote on the Bill until she was forced to do so by the Supreme Court last week. She resisted Labour's calls for a plan and then a wider White Paper until it became clear that she would lose any battle to force her to do so. Just before Christmas, she was resisting giving the House a vote on the final deal—a position that she has had to adjust.

That is why the amendments tabled by the Labour party are so important. They are intended to establish a number of key principles that the Government must seek to negotiate during the process, including securing full tariff and impediment-free access to the single market. They are intended to ensure that there is robust and regular parliamentary scrutiny by requiring the Secretary of State to report to the House at least every two months on progress being made in the negotiations and to provide documents that are being given to the European Parliament. The amendments would also require the Government to consult regularly the Governments of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland throughout the Brexit negotiations. I have recognised on numerous occasions the specific issues and concerns of those living in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and I support the proposition that they should absolutely be consulted throughout the process and that their interests should be borne in mind.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I will press on for a minute and then take interventions.

The amendments would also ensure that this House has the first say, not the last say, on the deal proposed at the end of the article 50 negotiations.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Keir Starmer:** I will give way in a minute, but I want to make some progress, if I may.

We also support amendments in relation to workplace rights and environmental rights, and we will be making the case that the legal status of EU nationals should be resolved before negotiations take place. I recognise the Government's position on EU nationals and the work done to try to ensure that there is a reciprocal arrangement, but that has not worked, and now the Prime Minister should act unilaterally to give assurance to EU nationals living in this country. I am sure that all hon. Members will have had, in their surgeries, EU nationals in tears over the uncertainty of their situation. I have seen it at every public meeting I have attended on the topic and at every surgery. I understand the constraints, but we must now act unilaterally to secure their position.

Taken together, the amendments would put real grip and accountability into the process, and the Government should welcome them, not reject them out of hand.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I will make some progress and then give way. I am mindful of the fact that 99 Back Benchers want to speak, and it is important, on such an issue, that I set out our position.

It is important to remember what the Bill does and does not do. It empowers the Prime Minister to trigger article 50—no more, no less. It is the start of the negotiating process, not the end. It does not give the Prime Minister a blank cheque—and here I want to make a wider point that has not been made clearly enough so far in any of our debates: no Prime Minister, under article 50 or any other provision, can change domestic law through international negotiations. That can only be done in this Parliament. If she seeks to change our immigration laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our tax laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our employment laws, our consumer protection laws or our environmental laws, she will have to do so in this Parliament in primary legislation. If she seeks to change our current arrangements in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, she will have to do so in Parliament in primary legislation.

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman not realise that the very point of our leaving the EU is to ensure that this place can make decisions on those very points?

**Keir Starmer:** Yes.

When the Secretary of State last week said there would be many votes on many pieces of legislation in the next few years, he was not wrong. In each of those votes, at every twist and turn, Labour will argue that jobs, the economy and living standards must come first. We will argue that all the workers' rights, consumer rights and environmental protections derived from EU law should be fully protected—no qualifications, limitations or sunset clauses.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): My hon. and learned Friend rightly points to the very necessary consultation that must take place with the devolved Administrations, but on 17 January I asked the Secretary of State what discussions he had had with the north-east about the impact of leaving the single market, given that 58% of our exports go to the EU. Does my hon. and learned Friend share my concern that we still do not have an answer to that question—whether the Secretary of State has even had those discussions—as well as many other questions?

**Keir Starmer:** I agree, and I urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to ensure that there is the greatest consultation in relation to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. They each have specific areas of concern, which are well known to this House.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman share my concern that if no deal has been struck at the end of this process, all options must remain open and it will be for this place, not the Government, to decide what happens next?

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention. It is to ensure that this place has a meaningful role that Labour has tabled these amendment, in relation to the final vote, to ensure that the issue comes here first, rather than later.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): In that spirit, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is astonishing that the Government have not told us when they will publish the White Paper? Does he agree that it should be published ahead of the Bill's Committee stage, which is scheduled for next week?

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention. My view is clear: the White Paper ought to be published as soon as possible, and before the Committee stage is concluded, and I hope that it will be.

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make some progress, given the number of hon. Members who want to come in on this debate.

More broadly, Labour will be arguing for a strong, collaborative future relationship with the EU. In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister said that she does not

“seek to hold on to bits of membership as we leave”.

That is short-sighted, as we are now finding in relation to Euratom. Why would we want to be outside the European Aviation Safety Agency, which certifies aircraft before they are allowed to fly? Why would we want to be outside the European Medicines Agency, which ensures that all medicines in the EU market are safe and effective? Why would we want to be outside Europol and Eurojust, which, as the Prime Minister and I know, are agencies that work closely together in the prevention and detection of serious crime and terrorism? The same goes for the European Environment Agency and Euratom. We challenge the Prime Minister on these fronts and ask that consideration be given to finding ways to ensure that where we can we stay within those agencies, for the obvious benefits that they bring, and we will absolutely challenge any suggestion that the Prime Minister has any authority whatsoever to rip up our economic and social model and turn the UK into a tax-haven economy.

I come back to the vote on this Bill. It is a limited vote: a vote to allow the Prime Minister to start the article 50 process. It is not a vote on the outcome, nor is it a vote on wider issues, which will fall to be voted on separately, but it is a vote to start the process. I know that there are some colleagues on the Benches behind me who do not feel able to support the Bill. I respect their views, just as I respect the views of constituents who feel the same way. I also understand and recognise the anxiety of so many in the 48% who voted to remain about their future, their values and their identity. They did not vote themselves out of their own future, and their views matter as much now as they did on 23 June last year.

I hope that the respectful approach that I have tried to adopt to colleagues and to the anxiety among the 48% is reflected across the House and that we will see a good deal less of the gloating from those who campaigned to leave than we have seen in the past. It is our duty to accept and respect the outcome of the referendum, but we remain a European country, with a shared history and shared values. It is also our duty to fight for a new relationship with our EU partners that reflects our values, our commitment to internationalism and our

commitment to an open and tolerant society. Above all, it is our duty to ensure an outcome that is not just for the 52% or for the 48%, but for the 100%. That we will do.

1.25 pm

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Mr Speaker, you will not be surprised to hear that it is my intention to vote against the Second Reading of this Bill, if a vote is called, and to support the reasoned amendment, which I think will be moved very shortly by the Scottish nationalists.

Because of the rather measured position that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had to present on behalf of the official Labour party, it falls to me to be the first Member of this House to set out the case for why I believe—I hope that I will not be the last such speaker—that it is in the national interest for the United Kingdom to be a member of the European Union, why I believe that we have benefited from that position for the past 45 years and, most importantly, why I believe that future generations will benefit if we succeed in remaining a member of the European Union. It is a case that hardly received any national publicity during the extraordinary referendum campaign, but it goes to the heart of the historic decision that the House is being asked to make now.

It so happens that my political career entirely coincides with British involvement with the European Union. I started over 50 years ago, supporting Harold Macmillan's application to join. I helped to get the majority cross-party vote for the European Communities Act 1972, before we joined in 1973, and it looks like my last Parliament is going to be the Parliament in which we leave, but I do not look back with any regret. We made very wise decisions. I believe that membership of the European Union was the way in which we got out of the appalling state we were in when we discovered after Suez that we had no role in the world that we were clear about once we had lost our empire, and that our economy was becoming a laughing stock because we were falling behind the countries on the continent that had been devastated in the war but appeared to have a better way of proceeding than we did.

I believe that our membership of the European Union restored to us our national self-confidence and gave us a political role in the world, as a leading member of the Union, which made us more valuable to our allies such as the United States, and made our rivals, such as the Russians, take us more seriously because of our leadership role in the European Union. It helped to reinforce our own values as well. Our economy benefited enormously and continued to benefit even more, as the market developed, from our close and successful involvement in developing trading relationships with the inhabitants of the continent.

**Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Clarke:** I am very fortunate to be called this early. I apologise to my right hon. Friend—my old friend—but 93 other Members are still waiting to be called, so if he will forgive me, I will not give way.

The Conservative Governments in which I served made very positive contributions to the development of the European Union. There were two areas in which we

were the leading contender and made a big difference. The first was when the Thatcher Government led the way in the creation of the single market. The customs union—the so-called common market—had served its purpose, but regulatory barriers matter more than tariffs in the modern world. But for the Thatcher Government, the others would not have been induced to remove those barriers, and I think that the British benefited more from the single market than any other member state. It has contributed to our comparative economic success today.

We were always the leading Government after the fall of the Soviet Union in the process of enlargement to eastern Europe, taking in the former Soviet states. That was an extremely important political contribution. After the surprising collapse of the Soviet Union, eastern and central Europe could have collapsed into its traditional anarchy, nationalist rivalry and military regimes that preceded the second world war. We pressed the urgency of bringing in these new independent nations, giving them the goal of the European Union, which meant liberal democracy, free market trade and so forth. We made Europe a much more stable place.

That has been our role in the European Union, and I believe that it is a very bad move, particularly for our children and grandchildren, that we are all sitting here now saying that we are embarking on a new unknown future. I shall touch on that in a moment, because I think the position is simply baffling to every friend of the British and of the United Kingdom throughout the world. That is why I shall vote against the Bill.

Let me deal with the arguments that I should not vote in that way, that I am being undemocratic, that I am quite wrong, and that, as an elected Member of Parliament, I am under a duty to vote contrary to the views I have just given. I am told that this is because we held a referendum. First, I am in the happy situation that my opposition to referendums as an instrument of government is quite well known and has been frequently repeated throughout my political career. I have made no commitment to accept a referendum, and particularly this referendum, when such an enormous question, with hundreds of complex issues wrapped up within it, was to be decided by a simple yes/no answer on one day. That was particularly unsuitable for a plebiscite of that kind, and that point was reinforced by the nature of the debate.

Constitutionally, when the Government tried to stop the House having a vote, they did not go to the Supreme Court arguing that a referendum bound the House and that that was why we should not have a vote. The referendum had always been described as advisory in everything that the Government put out. There is no constitutional standing for referendums in this country. No sensible country has referendums—the United States and Germany do not have them in their political systems. The Government went to the Supreme Court arguing for the archaic constitutional principle of the royal prerogative—that the Executive somehow had absolute power when it came to dealing with treaties. Not surprisingly, they lost.

What about the position of Members of Parliament? There is no doubt that by an adequate but narrow majority, leave won the referendum campaign. I will not comment on the nature of the campaign. Those arguments that got publicity in the national media on both sides were, on the whole, fairly pathetic. I have agreed in

conversation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that he and I can both tell ourselves that neither of us used the dafter arguments that were put forward by the people we were allied with. It was not a very serious debate on the subject. I do not recall the view that £350 million a week would be available for the health service coming from the Brexit Secretary, and I did not say that we going to have a Budget to put up income tax and all that kind of thing. It was all quite pathetic.

Let me provide an analogy—a loose one but, I think, not totally loose—explaining the position of Members of Parliament after this referendum. I have fought Lord knows how many elections over the past 50 years, and I have always advocated voting Conservative. The British public, in their wisdom, have occasionally failed to take my advice and have by a majority voted Labour. I have thus found myself here facing a Labour Government, but I do not recall an occasion when I was told that it was my democratic duty to support Labour policies and the Labour Government on the other side of the House. That proposition, if put to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) in opposition or myself, would have been treated with ridicule and scorn. Apparently, I am now being told that despite voting as I did in the referendum, I am somehow an enemy of the people for ignoring my instructions and for sticking to the opinions that I expressed rather strongly, at least in my meetings, when I urged people to vote the other way.

I have no intention of changing my opinion on the ground. Indeed, I am personally convinced that the hard-core Eurosceptics in my party, with whom I have enjoyed debating this issue for decades, would not have felt bound in the slightest by the outcome of the referendum to abandon their arguments—[*Interruption.*] I do not say that as criticism; I am actually on good terms with the hard-line Eurosceptics because I respect their sincerity and the passionate nature of their beliefs. If I ever live to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) turn up here and vote in favour of Britain remaining in the European Union, I will retract what I say, but hot tongs would not make him vote for membership of the EU.

I must move on, but I am told that I should vote for my party as we are on a three-line Whip. I am a Conservative; I have been a decently loyal Conservative over the years. The last time I kicked over the traces was on the Lisbon treaty, when for some peculiar reason my party got itself on the wrong side of the argument, but we will pass over that. I would point out to those who say that I am somehow being disloyal to my party by not voting in favour of this Bill that I am merely propounding the official policy of the Conservative party for 50 years until 23 June 2016. I admire my colleagues who can suddenly become enthusiastic Brexiteers, having seen a light on the road to Damascus on the day that the vote was cast, but I am afraid that that light has been denied me.

I feel the spirit of my former colleague, Enoch Powell—I rather respected him, aside from one or two of his extreme views—who was probably the best speaker for the Eurosceptic cause I ever heard in this House of Commons. If he were here, he would probably find it amazing that his party had become Eurosceptic and rather mildly anti-immigrant, in a very strange way, in 2016. Well, I am afraid that, on that issue, I have not followed it, and I do not intend to do so.

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

There are very serious issues that were not addressed in the referendum: the single market and the customs union. They must be properly debated. It is absurd to say that every elector knew the difference between the customs union and the single market, and that they took a careful and studied view of the basis for our future trading relations with Europe.

The fact is that I admire the Prime Minister and her colleagues for their constant propounding of the principles of free trade. My party has not changed on that. We are believers in free trade and see it as a win-win situation. We were the leading advocate of liberal economic policies among the European powers for many years, so we are free traders. It seems to me unarguable that if we put between us and the biggest free market in the world new tariffs, new regulatory barriers, new customs procedures, certificates of origin and so on, we are bound to be weakening the economic position from what it would otherwise have been, other things being equal, in future. That is why it is important that this issue is addressed in particular.

I am told that that view is pessimistic, and that we are combining withdrawal from the single market and the customs union with a great new globalised future that offers tremendous opportunities for us. Apparently, when we follow the rabbit down the hole, we will emerge in a wonderland where, suddenly, countries throughout the world are queuing up to give us trading advantages and access to their markets that we were never able to achieve as part of the European Union. Nice men like President Trump and President Erdogan are impatient to abandon their normal protectionism and give us access. Let me not be too cynical; I hope that that is right. I do want the best outcome for the United Kingdom from this process. No doubt somewhere a hatter is holding a tea party with a dormouse in the teapot.

We need success in these trade negotiations to recoup at least some of the losses that we will incur as a result of leaving the single market. If all is lost on the main principle, that is the big principle that the House must get control of and address seriously, in proper debates and votes, from now on.

I hope that I have adequately explained that my views on this issue have not been shaken very much over the decades—they have actually strengthened somewhat. Most Members, I trust, are familiar with Burke's address to the electors of Bristol. I have always firmly believed that every MP should vote on an issue of this importance according to their view of the best national interest. I never quote Burke, but I shall paraphrase him. He said to his constituents, "If I no longer give you the benefit of my judgment and simply follow your orders, I am not serving you; I am betraying you." I personally shall be voting with my conscience content, and when we see what unfolds hereafter as we leave the European Union, I hope that the consciences of other Members of Parliament will remain equally content.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Angus Robertson. [*Interruption.*] No; the amendment has been tabled in his name, but I think it is Mr Gethins who is going to orate to the House, and we look forward to that with eager anticipation.

1.42 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and add:

this House declines to give a Second Reading to the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill as the Government has set out no provision for effective consultation with the devolved administrations on implementing Article 50, has yet to publish a White Paper detailing the Government's policy proposals, has refused to give a guarantee on the position of EU nationals in the UK, has left unanswered a range of detailed questions covering many policy areas about the full implications of withdrawal from the single market and has provided no assurance that a future parliamentary vote will be anything other than irrelevant, as withdrawal from the European Union follows two years after the invoking of Article 50 if agreement is not reached in the forthcoming negotiations, unless they are prolonged by unanimity.

The amendment stands in my name and, indeed, that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), as well as those of other colleagues, including representatives of the various constituent parts of the United Kingdom. I thank Members in all parts of the House for backing it today.

It is a privilege to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who spoke a huge amount of sense—a great deal more sense than we have heard in recent times. He made some exceptional points, for which I thank him. It is also a privilege for us that he will be voting with us tomorrow evening. In particular, he made some good points about the benefits of the European Union, and it is important for us to reflect, even briefly, on those.

The European Union has had an impact on all of us, from the progress that we have made as member states in protecting workers' and parents' rights and the environment to our progress in helping to bring about peace, security and prosperity over the past 70 years—something that was never guaranteed. There are endless reasons for voting for our amendment, and I know that a number of my colleagues will touch on them today and tomorrow. One of the main reasons, however, must be connected with scrutiny. What is the purpose of having a Parliament—what is the purpose of us all being here—if it is not to scrutinise the work of the Government? Their unwillingness to subject this decision to any proper scrutiny reflects a lack of confidence in their own position and in the process that will follow once this has been done.

It is good that, despite the Government's best efforts, we are to have a say on the triggering of article 50, but we did have to drag them here kicking and screaming, and at great expense. I also think it imperative for all Members to reflect on the debt of gratitude that we owe to Gina Miller, who made today's debate possible. Today, however, I want to reflect on our amendment.

Primarily, what we want is scrutiny. It is interesting that the Government have not published a White Paper in time for the debate, and that they want to publish it after the Bill has been passed. That must surely be unprecedented. Secondly, there is a lack of respect for the devolution settlement. Thirdly, there are the consequences of leaving the EU without certainty, and fourthly, there is the vision of the United Kingdom that is being created.

One enormous step that the Government could have taken—this was touched on by both the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and the hon. and learned

Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—was to deal with the position of the EU nationals who contribute so much to our country. Given that the Government are surely in need of friends with influence, they should give those people the certainty that they and we need.

Let us reflect for a moment on why there is so much uncertainty. The leave supporters campaigned on a blank piece of paper, an act of gross irresponsibility and negligence which has been perpetuated by the Government over the past nine months and which lies at the heart of why we need a White Paper. I must add, as the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union returns to the Chamber, that Ministers, both present and previous, who supported the leave campaign bear a particular culpability when it comes to the uncertainty in which we now find ourselves.

Will we have the White Paper before the Bill's Committee stage? Will we go through the normal process, whereby we see a White Paper before a Bill is passed? That has certainly been the practice in the past when the House has been given a say. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe reflected on European debates gone by. I remind Members that John Major published a White Paper before entering the negotiations on the Amsterdam treaty in 1996. The Foreign Secretary is no longer in the Chamber, but I also remind Members that Gordon Brown, who was Prime Minister at the time, published a White Paper on the Lisbon treaty.

What are the Government afraid of? My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who is present, has some experience of referendums and of scrutiny. I have here a copy of the Scottish White Paper. This is what a proper White Paper looks like.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con)  
*rose—*

**Stephen Gethins:** This White Paper contains 670 pages of details of what the country looked like, and it was published a year before the Scottish referendum. There was no scrabbling around for the odd detail nearly a year after a referendum. It is a disgrace, and the Government should be ashamed.

**Mrs Murray** *rose—*

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what that White Paper told the people of Scotland? Did it tell them what currency they would be using if they voted for Scottish independence?

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. Does he know what the White Paper talked about? It talked about currency. Moreover, a Fiscal Commission Working Group was set up. So much more work was put into that.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** *rose—*

**Stephen Gethins:** On the issue of modernity and progress for this country, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I seem to remember that the Scottish people blew a large raspberry at that White Paper.

**Stephen Gethins:** The Scottish people had an opportunity to discuss and debate it. It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman does not trust the people enough to give them some details, and campaigned on a blank page.

Let me gently remind the House that this is a big deal. We are not just divvying up the Nana Mouskouri records or the “Borgen” box sets. This will have an impact on each and every one of us. We published the details, and we can reflect on that. You do not have the courage of your convictions.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is in a state of great animation and excitement, and I do not want to spoil that for him, but I have always had the courage of my convictions, and, therefore, his breach of parliamentary protocol is, in this case, mildly offensive. May I just remind him that debate here takes place through the Chair? The word “you” is not only not required, but should be deleted from any part of his text.

**Stephen Gethins:** I apologise, Mr Speaker. You, of course, have the courage of your convictions every time, although those on the Government Benches may be a different matter altogether—but that is well said, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I am sure you will also agree with me that scrutiny is a good thing; it strengthens governance and has a major role to play.

Let me talk about the devolution settlement and what has been happening. The Secretary of State talked earlier about listening. He says a great deal about listening, but I have not seen anything that has changed so far from all this listening that has been going on; I have not been seeing any changes. They were listening in Cardiff all day yesterday, and we have seen nothing. The Court ruling made the point that this is a political decision; the decision to involve the devolved Administrations should be a political one.

**Mrs Murray** *rose—*

**Stephen Gethins:** The Secretary of State for Scotland has also said that the Bill will put the Sewel convention on to “a statutory footing.” If that was the case and he was true to his word, we would not be in the situation we are in just now.

Only two plans have come forward. One was from the Scottish Government about Scotland's place in Europe, and I also pay credit to Plaid Cymru and to Labour colleagues who managed to pull together a plan from the Welsh Government as well. Fair play to them for putting aside their political differences and producing more detail.

**Mrs Murray** *rose—*

**Stephen Gethins:** The Scottish Government plans have won praise from stakeholders and European partners across the spectrum. They would maintain our place in the single market, give new powers to the Scottish Parliament—as suggested by the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove)—and ensure that EU nationals can continue to stay.

On that point I will give way to the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray).

**Mrs Murray:** It has taken a long time for the hon. Gentleman to take my intervention, but I am somewhat confused as to how he expects to get a 600-page White Paper on a two-clause Bill. Can he explain that to me please?

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Lady says she is confused. I will make this point: if the Government come forward with a White Paper that is not quite 670 pages, I think we will be okay with that on these Benches. Indeed, if the Secretary of State comes forward with a White Paper, it would be some progress. But the hon. Lady is a little confused: may I remind her and others on the Conservative Benches on a point of democracy that they got their worst general election result in Scotland since 1865, so they could do with a little bit of listening? They are being pulled by their nose by the UK Independence party who have never even saved their parliamentary deposit in Scotland. Let me say on democracy that the Conservatives govern on 15% of the votes, claim a victory on one in five voters, and want to bring powers back to this place and hand them to the House of Lords.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I will not give way any more.

The consequences of leaving the EU will be significant for universities, for the opportunities that I had and people should continue to have, and for our environment and low-carbon industries. Paragraph 22 of the “Explanatory Notes” says:

“This Bill is not expected to have any financial implications.”

That is courageous, indeed.

Finally, on vision—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I am not going to take any more interventions.

This is a debate—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) has made it clear that he is not giving way, and may I gently say that an enormous amount of heckling is taking place, sometimes from the hon. Gentleman’s own Benches? They are heckling more loudly than I shout when watching Britain in the Davis cup, and I do not do that while play is in progress.

**Stephen Gethins:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Let me gently remind colleagues about this. As well as learning a lesson on democracy and on the Conservatives’ abject failure in terms of winning any kind of vote in Scotland, this House is at a crossroads today. Are we going to have a future of continuing progress and prosperity whereby we maintain a close relationship with our partners in Europe, as set out by the Scottish Government in our plans—which were a compromise, when we failed to see any kind of compromise from the other side?

Political opponents in Wales have been able to compromise. The Scottish Government, in spite of two thirds of people in Scotland voting to remain in the EU, have been able to set out a compromise. The alternative to that is a path of isolationism and exceptionalism that

leaves us desperately scrabbling around for friends, and the Prime Minister, who has left the Chamber, will note the reaction to her visit to Washington on streets the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Going back in history, Scotland has done well as an EU member state. I want to see us continue with research, trade and political alliances going back centuries, and where sharing sovereignty is a good thing. As another lesson to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, I say that that is sharing sovereignty, but what is not sharing sovereignty is being forced to have a Trident missile submarine that the Scottish people are against and 98.5% of Scottish MPs have moved against. What is not sovereign is being taken out of the EU against our will, and what is not sovereign is having a Tory Government that have one MP in charge of our affairs.

Europe is where our future lies. It is one where we tackle inequality and climate change and where refugees get help—areas that do not get much of a hearing in Whitehall these days. Pooling our sovereignty and working together is a good thing. If the House passes this Bill and turns its back on our amendment, it will be turning its back on the progress made and disrespecting the devolution settlement.

I urge Members to vote for our amendment; otherwise, this is a backward and damaging step, and an act of constitutional and economic sabotage.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I referenced earlier the very large number of colleagues wishing to contribute, which I am afraid necessitates the imposition on Back Benches, with immediate effect, of a six-minute time limit.

1.56 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): This has been for me, and for many of us, a very long journey. It is 30 years since I tabled an amendment to the Single European Act to retain the sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament. I have to say, Mr Speaker, that it was denied me; the amendment was not selected. However, I looked with interest at clause 1 of this Bill, which says:

“This section has effect despite any provision made by or under the European Communities Act 1972 or any other enactment.”

I believe that that satisfies the requirements of sovereignty in respect of this Bill.

I want to pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). I respect him and the way in which we have battled over these matters over all these years. We have done so over a similar period of time—he from a little earlier than me, I must admit—but we have been on different roads, and now we have arrived at different destinations.

For me, the referendum was a massive peaceful revolution by consent, of historic proportions. This Bill at last endorses that revolution. From the 17th century right the way through our history—through the corn laws, the parliamentary reform Act that gave the vote to the working class, the suffragettes who got the vote in 1928, and then again in the period of appeasement—there have been great benchmarks of British history and they have all ultimately been determined by the decisions taken in this House, and, if I may be permitted to say so, by Back Benches. That is where the decisions have

so often been taken. The fact is that the fundamental question on which we have fought not only this referendum but all the battles back to the 1980s has been that of who governs this country. This Bill answers that question.

With respect to the Bill itself, I simply say—I do not want to spend time on this, but just to make the point; and the shadow Minister for Brexit, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), made the same point—that if one looks at the Supreme Court decision, it is clear from the manner in which its ruling was given that this is not about timing, method, our relationship with the European Union or the terms of withdrawal. That is all set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the judgment itself. It goes on to say at paragraph 1.22 that the freedom to make these decisions lies exclusively with Parliament, and that is where we are now embarking on yet another journey.

With respect to the referendum, I came to the conclusion back in 1990, looking at the Labour and Conservative Front Benches in the House of Commons, that nothing was going to break the collusion between those two Front Benches on the European issue or on the question of sovereignty. A strategic decision had to be taken, so I set up the Maastricht referendum campaign. After many, many years, we have reached this point, largely on account of the efforts made by all my hon. Friends on this side of the House and by those I will describe as my hon. Friends on the other side. They have all fought the same battle in the same way. They include Peter Shore, Tony Benn, my hon. Friends the Members for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins)—

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Bob Cryer.

**Sir William Cash:** Yes, Bob Cryer, and others. This has been a huge battle, and I do not disrespect the Governments of either party for the decisions that they have taken during this period, because they have been forming judgments, although they fell short of what we needed in this country. In this democratic cockpit, we had to fight our battles and to stand up for our own constituents. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe said, we had to stand up for what we believed in. Conscience, principles and convictions must drive our decision making. Remoaners who wish to vote against the Bill simply do not get the scale of what this revolution involves. They say that they respect and accept it, but they do not.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that although there has been a vote to leave the EU, there has not been a vote on the terms of our withdrawal from it? Does he also accept that as soon as article 50 is triggered, those terms will be decided by the EU 27 and not by anyone here? What sort of democracy is that?

**Sir William Cash:** From the beginning, my main objection has been that decisions are often taken in that way. The hon. Gentleman sits on the European Scrutiny Committee, which I chair, and he knows perfectly well that I have complained vigorously, for ever, about the fact that decisions are taken behind closed doors within the EU. It was not about our sovereignty; it was about

theirs. Their sovereignty has been imposed on us. That is why I objected to it, and that is why we are standing here today.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I wish to say that Eurosceptics in this House owe a great debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who has been our leader on this issue for many decades.

**Sir William Cash:** I am very touched by my good friend's comment.

We fought for a referendum on Maastricht and afterwards. We fought to unshackle the United Kingdom from increasingly undemocratic European government. Those who vote against the Bill will be voting against the outcome of the referendum. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), is absolutely right to say that we must trust the people. Those Members will be voting against the people and against their vote, as expressed in the referendum. If the House of Lords were to attempt to stand in the way of the vote by the British people, it would be committing political suicide. This Westminster Parliament is now the focus, where the instructions of the British people have to be carried out, and that is what we will do. I shall repeat the words of William Pitt in the Guildhall speech of 1805:

“England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe”—

and the United Kingdom—  
by her example.”

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I must appeal to Members not to keep coming up to the Chair and asking where they are on the list, either explicitly or by the back door by asking, “Is it all right if I go to the loo?”, “May I have a cup of tea?” or “Am I permitted to eat a biscuit?” I shall do my best to accommodate everyone in the substantial amount of time available, but I appeal to colleagues to show a little patience and some regard for the Chair needing to concentrate on the debate. I will get you in if I possibly can, and so will all other occupants of the Chair.

2.5 pm

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Our relationship with Europe has run like a contentious thread through our politics for more than 60 years, and the referendum revealed a nation that remains divided. Though it pains me to say it, for the reasons so ably set out by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—the Foreign Secretary, who is no longer in his place, was shaking his head throughout that speech, probably because he did not wish to be reminded of the arguments he had included in that other article, which he chose not to publish back in June—we are leaving the European Union, and our task now is to try to bring people together. This means that, whether we voted leave or remain, we have a responsibility to hold in our minds the views, concerns and hopes of everyone in our country, whether they voted leave or remain.

[Hilary Benn]

The Supreme Court decided, rightly in my view, that a decision of this magnitude should be made by Parliament and not by the Executive, but with that power comes a responsibility to respect the outcome of the referendum, however much some of us might disagree with it. This is about democracy. This is about faith in our politics, not just in the United Kingdom but across the western world, where—if we are honest—it is not in very good shape. If this Parliament were to say to the people, “You did not know what you were doing, only 37% voted leave, the referendum was only advisory and there were lots of lies”—whether or not we agree with some of those assertions—we really would have a crisis of confidence in our politics, for the reasons so eloquently set out by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). That is why the democratic thing to do is to vote for this Bill, and I shall do so tomorrow.

But the referendum decided only one thing: the fact that we are leaving the institutions of the European Union. It did not determine the terms on which we leave or our new relationship with the other 27 member states. That is why we have, as a nation, to get our objectives and the process right as we start this great negotiation. The Government’s handling of this matter so far has not shown sufficient respect for Parliament—notwithstanding the number of times the Secretary of State has come to the Dispatch Box. For several months, Ministers appeared to believe that saying that there would be “no running commentary” and telling those asking for greater clarity that they were not, in the words of the No. 10 spokesperson, “backing the UK team” was the right approach. It was not. Commitments have eventually been made to set out objectives, to seek transitional arrangements, to publish a White Paper and to confirm that Parliament will have a vote—all things that the Exiting the European Union Committee, which I have the honour to chair, called for—but at every stage, far from being freely made, they were reluctantly conceded, usually a day or two after the Secretary of State had resisted them from the Dispatch Box.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): My right hon. Friend refers to the fact that the Government now say that there will be a vote on the eventual deal. I presume that what they mean is that, under the provisions of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010, there will be a single vote on an unamendable motion in relation to a treaty. I do not think that that is good enough. If the European Parliament—and, for that matter, the Irish Dáil and the French Assemblée Nationale—will have the right to consider such a treaty line by line, this House should have that right as well.

**Hilary Benn:** I agree with my hon. Friend, but the House must have a proper plan and, in the words of my Front-Bench colleague, a “meaningful” opportunity to scrutinise the agreement in draft, rather than being presented with a fait accompli at the end of the process. This is one example of how the Government have had to be pushed, cajoled and prodded at every stage into giving Parliament its proper role.

I say to the Secretary of State—this may not be his fault—that it is extraordinary that we meet here today, and are being asked to vote on this Bill tomorrow, when

not a single Government document setting out the consequences has been published. Seven months after the British people reached their decision, there has been no economic assessment, no analysis of the options, and no White Paper. That is not the way to do things and that attitude must change. The Government need to recognise that Parliament should be not a bystander but a participant in what is probably the most complex and significant negotiation that this country has ever faced. We have to unwind and recast 43 years of relationships with our neighbours. It affects every area of our national life, every part of the country, every person, community and business, and the jobs and incomes on which they depend. It is therefore essential that we have unity of purpose in trying to get the best deal for Britain, despite the inevitable uncertainty of the outcome.

We will come to the issues of substance in Committee and subsequently. What does special access to the single market mean now that the Prime Minister has decided that we are leaving it? How exactly will seeking to remain and leave the customs union at the same time work? If ensuring a continuation of tariff and barrier-free trade is a priority for Ministers, but Europe comes back and says, “You can’t have your cake and eat it. You have to choose,” I trust that the Government will choose to remain in the customs union. The world is more uncertain now than at any time over the past 60 years, so how will we continue to co-operate with our neighbours on foreign policy, defence, security and the fight against terrorism?

Finally, the referendum result revealed something else: two great political forces in the western world are now reflected in our politics. On the one hand, people desire greater devolution and control in a world in which many believe that we barely have any control at all owing to the pace of change in our lives. On the other hand, every single Member of the House, whether we voted leave or remain, understands that in the modern world we have to co-operate with our neighbours to deal with the great challenges that we will face in the years and centuries ahead. Leaving the European Union may change the balance between the two, but it will not change the necessity to embrace both as we look to the future.

2.12 pm

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I rise to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn)—not that I will agree with much of what he said, but I fully respect his ability and strength of purpose, in line with what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, to stand by his convictions. It is therefore a privilege to follow him.

It is also a privilege for me, as it is for many of my colleagues, to speak on this Bill. It is without doubt that I support the Government and therefore the passage of this Bill. I commend the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Opposition spokesman, who made a particularly measured speech on what the Bill is and is not about. He was clear in his words, for which I commend him because I actually agreed with them when he said that this is about giving the Government the right to invoke article 50, and nothing more. He said in his interesting speech that no

place but here can have the right to change domestic laws, and I agree. That is why I and my hon. Friends have urged that we repeal the European Communities Act 1972 at the same time. Strictly speaking, that is not necessary under article 50, but it is the right thing to do domestically and provides an answer to those who say, “But what will we do about all these issues?” Every element of our membership of the European Union is within that Act, and I am certain that the House will debate that for many hours and reach a decision.

I have a huge amount of respect for my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe. We served together in the same Government and have debated this issue for a long time. There is nobody whom I respect more in this House than him. He is as constant as the compass. There is absolutely no way in which anyone could have any doubt about where he was going to be not only on this matter, but on many others. I look across the Chamber to my erstwhile right hon. Friend, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), who will agree that during the coalition Government we absolutely knew where my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was going to be on many issues in Cabinet—invariably not where the Government were.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): Not only is our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) to be respected for his views on Europe, about which he has been entirely consistent and courteous, but he was surely one of the most remarkable Chancellors of the Exchequer that our country has seen.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I do not doubt that at all. In fact, so successful was he that he managed to tie the following Government in all sorts of knots as they sought to pursue his policies without any of the same drive or intelligence in how they were going to do it.

My purpose today is simply to explain that I opposed the Maastricht treaty. In case anybody asks, I did not actually want to leave the European Union. I originally voted to join the European Union, or the Common Market as it was then, but when it came to Maastricht I decided that there was something fundamentally wrong with the direction of travel. I am going to raise the name of an individual whom not many people in this House ever raise in debate: Altiero Spinelli. He was essentially the architect of both the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty. His purpose was quite clear. He believed that the whole purpose of the European project was the eradication of the nature of the nation state. He said:

“If a post war order is established in which each State retains its complete national sovereignty, the basis for a Third World War would still exist”.

I do not agree with him, and I never did. The reason we fell into the terrible cataclysm of the second world war following the great depression was the absence of democracy and, most importantly, robust democratic institutions in many European states. War will never happen where we have democracy and strong democratic institutions with open trade. Such democracies simply will not do that. My sense was that the European Union’s direction of travel from Maastricht was bound on a course that was going to lead to the UK ultimately deciding that it can no longer stay within it.

I agree with much of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe said. I have come to a different conclusion, but I fully respect anyone who decides to vote against the triggering of article 50. They were sent here to use their judgment. Yes, the British people have made a decision, but the job of an MP is to use judgment on such matters. If somebody chooses to oppose the Bill, I will respect that. I will disagree with them, but they deserve a hearing and we should in no way attempt to shout them down.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and for his thoughts on democracy. Does he accept that Members in this House have less information about this crucial decision than the average local ward councillor has about their annual budget?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I am grateful for that intervention, but I do not agree. Given the past 40 years, if anybody in this House does not have enough information to make a decision, I wonder where they have been for all those years—or the years that they have spent here. Of course we have enough information. The hon. Lady is referring to the publication of the White Paper, which the Government have said they will publish. I stand by that and think it is a good idea. I must say, however, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a pretty good fist of it in her recent speech, in which she set out the 12 points that will guide her negotiation. I hope that the Government reprint them with a couple of diagrams, the odd explanation and a nice picture, which will make an excellent White Paper.

I absolutely do not agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe that my party is somehow anti-immigrant. When I was in government with him, both in coalition and subsequently, we did more than any other country to help those who were displaced as a result of the wars in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. As a Government and as a country, we should be proud of our support for immigration. Whatever other countries choose to do, we put ourselves on the side of those who flee terror.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for that clarification. We are not anti-immigrant, and I do not think that anyone who voted to leave the European Union is anti-immigrant. There is a difference between being anti-immigrant and being anti-uncontrolled immigration. It was the latter that the British public were against. They wanted control, and many people of different backgrounds voted to leave the European Union.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** That is the point: they wanted to take back control. They are not anti-immigration but simply want to make sure that it is controlled migration at a level that the country can absorb without any difficulties. That is where we should be on this, that is where my party should be and that is where we stand. I intend to pursue that because I am pro-migration.

**Chris Bryant:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because I have literally a matter of seconds and he will have plenty of time to speak.

[Mr Duncan Smith]

The only thing on which I disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe is that we are not the hatter's tea party. The hatter's tea party is sitting in opposition. I do not know who the dormouse is or who the hatter is, but I am sure they will tell us later.

Having listened throughout to all these debates, I will be voting tonight to trigger article 50. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tomorrow."] Tomorrow, I will be voting to trigger article 50 simply because of all the mistakes of the past. We were told that somehow we can place our trust in a larger body that will do a lot of our protections for us, but we cannot. As a nation state, we can be in Europe but not run by the European Union. That is why I am voting to trigger article 50 tomorrow.

2.20 pm

**Mr Nick Clegg** (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): As this is the formal beginning of a process that will most likely lead to the end of Britain's leading role in the heart of Europe and the European Union—a cause I have espoused and defended all my political life both in opposition and in government—I have to confess that of course I feel sad that we have come to this point, much as I was surprised and saddened, as many people were, by the outcome of the referendum last summer.

That sadness is increasingly mixed with a growing sense of anger at what I consider to be the Government's deliberate distortion of the mandate they received from the British people in a way that I think is divisive, damaging and self-serving.

Let us be clear: the British people gave the Government a mandate to pull the United Kingdom out of the European Union. The British people did not give this Government a mandate to threaten to turn our country into some tawdry, low-regulation, low-tax, cowboy economy. The British people did not vote to make themselves poorer by pulling out of the greatest free-trading single market the world has ever seen—incidentally, that is one of the many reasons why the Liberal Democrats believe that the British people should be given a say at the end of the process, much as they were given a say at the beginning. And the British people most certainly did not give a mandate to the Government to indulge in the ludicrous, sycophantic farce that we have seen in recent days in which this Government, having burned every bridge left with our friends in Europe, rushed across the Atlantic to sidle up to a US President without seeming to be aware that his nativism, isolationism and protectionism are diametrically opposed to the long-term strategic interests of the United Kingdom.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why my constituents, the majority of whom voted to leave, reject his party's call to hold a second referendum? I really believe it is an insult to the integrity of my constituents to promote that.

**Mr Clegg:** The insult was that the Brexit campaigners deliberately withheld from the British people what they meant by Brexit. It was a deliberate, effective but highly cynical tactic. We never received a manifesto with the views of Nigel Farage, the Foreign Secretary or the former Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for

Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), explaining what Brexit means. Therefore, when we finally know what Brexit really means in substance, rather than in utopian promise, of course the British people should have their say.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Clegg:** No, I wish to make some progress. That is why I believe that this House has not a choice but a duty to withhold from the Government the right to proceed with Brexit in the way they have planned. That would not stop Brexit but would simply urge the Government to go back to the drawing board and to come back to this House with a more sensible and moderate approach to Brexit.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Clegg:** I really wish to make some progress. I have only four minutes.

Some people say that there is no alternative, that we must leave the single market and that there is no remote chance that we could find an accommodation with our European partners. Nonsense. For instance, I confirm to the House that I have recently heard it on very good authority that senior German decision makers, shortly after the Prime Minister, no doubt to her surprise, found herself as Prime Minister without a shot—or indeed a vote—being fired, were keen to explore ways to deliver her an emergency brake. In return, they hoped for an undisruptive economic Brexit.

But what did this Government choose to do? They decided to spurn all friendship links with Europe. They decided to disregard the needs of Scotland, Northern Ireland and, indeed, our great capital London. They decided to placate parts of the Conservative party rather than serve the long-term strategic interests of this country. They decided to pander to the eye-popping vitriol and bile that we see every day from people like Mr Dacre, the editor of the *Daily Mail*, and other members of the moneyed elite who run the Brexit right-wing press in this country—and this Government have become too slavishly preoccupied with their opinions. But, above all, this Government have decided to disregard the hopes, the dreams and the aspirations of 16.1 million of our fellow citizens, which is more than have ever voted for a winning party in a general election—242 Westminster constituencies voted to remain.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Clegg:** No, I have only two minutes.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** You will get an extra minute.

**Mr Clegg:** All right.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I have a very simple question to ask and the right hon. Gentleman will get the rest of his minute. Does he recall that, during the referendum

campaign, the then Prime Minister and many others on the remain side said that if the British people voted to leave the European Union, it would absolutely mean that we leave the single market? Did he agree with that at the time?

**Mr Clegg:** It is a novel concept that the winning side in a competition invokes the arguments of the losing side to make a case that it did not make itself. That is ludicrous. The Brexit campaign deliberately did not spell out to the British people what Brexit means, which is why it is right that, when we finally do know what Brexit means, the British people have another say.

My final point is that the British Government have taken the mandate of 23 June 2016 and not only disregarded the 16.1 million people and the 242 constituencies that voted to remain but have very deliberately decided to ignore the pleas, the dreams, the aspirations and the plans of the people who should actually count most. It is our children and our grandchildren, the youth of Britain, who will have to live with the fateful consequences more than anybody in this House or anybody on the Government Front Bench, and—guess what?—conventional wisdom says that the youth of today are politically indifferent and do not participate but 64% of 18 to 24-year-old voters voted. They mobilised in huge, unprecedented numbers, and 73% of them voted for a different future.

I know that the vote of a 19-year-old does not weigh any differently in the ballot box from the vote of a 90-year-old but, when we search our consciences, as we have just been asked to do, we should search our consciences most especially about what country we think we are handing on to the next generation. Call me old-fashioned, but when a country decides to go on a radical, uncompromising departure to a new and as yet entirely unpredictable future, and does so against the explicit, stated wishes of those who have to inhabit that future, it is a country embarking on a perilous path, and I hope that our consciences will not pay for it.

I have a great sense of foreboding. Notwithstanding my personal admiration for the Secretary of State for Brexit, who will try to conduct his negotiations in good humour, the negotiations are going to get nasty and acrimonious. Just think what will happen in the British tabloid press when the Government first start arguing about money in the next few months. The Government's position is asking for the impossible and the undeliverable. Most especially, it is not possible to say that we will not abide by the rulings of a marketplace and then somehow claim that we will get unfettered access to that marketplace. That is not going to happen.

European leaders, many of whom I have spoken to, look at us with increasing dismay and disbelief at the incoherence and the confrontational manner in which this Government are proceeding with Brexit.

My final plea is that Members look to the long-term interests of our country and their constituents when voting, not to the short-term interests of this Government.

2.29 pm

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): In following the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), I rise proudly on this side of the House, where, I remind him, we are standing by our mandate of “Brexit means Brexit.” I also remind him that once a politician stood on a mandate of “No tuition fees.”

This Bill may be simple, small and perfectly formed, but its significance is way above its size. This Bill is about delivering on democracy and on commitments made by politicians to the electorate. Last June, the country spoke decisively in a democratic vote, in a referendum that had been initiated by a very large majority—more than 10 to one MPs—in this House, and we should all remember that. More people voted to leave the EU than have ever voted for a single political party. That vote cannot be ignored, so I will therefore be voting for this Bill on Second Reading and then supporting the Government in their negotiations to ensure that a good deal is obtained, which works primarily in the interests of the UK, but without damaging the 27 other member states of the EU. We do expect a professional attitude towards those negotiations from the European Union, without the vindictiveness that has come through in some of the statements made by European politicians.

In my commercial life before entering the House, I worked in many countries in Europe. I am fortunate to have represented the UK in European institutions, and I also have strong personal ties with Europe, as many of my family live in Denmark and are Danish, so I am certainly not anti-European. When people say that we are anti-European, I tell them that we are not leaving Europe—we are leaving the European Union. Europe is a fantastic place to call home—it is diverse in culture and language, and its unique history enriches us all—but the EU's goal of standardisation and a one-size-fits-all Europe has been a source of bewilderment to many of us.

While many countries, including our own, are devolving power away from central Government, the EU is moving in the opposite direction, centralising power in Brussels and imposing bureaucracy from above. The EU has constantly eroded national sovereignty and undermined the nation state. Its key decision makers in the European Commission are unelected and unaccountable, and nobody can say that the single currency has been a success for many of those countries facing such dire economic situations at the moment. It has been clear for some time that the EU needed fundamental reform, but it has become equally clear that it lacks the political will to do this.

So, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I have been consistent in my views about Europe. When I was first elected to Parliament, the Maastricht treaty was going through this House. I was a member of the Fresh Start group, with many of my colleagues here today, and I have not changed my position in 25 years of serving this country and my constituents. I made no secret of the fact that I supported the campaign to leave the EU, but I knew it was up to individuals to make up their own minds. Now the country has made that choice clear, the Prime Minister has made her intentions clear and we need to get on with it. The choice that some seem to be offering between what they call “hard Brexit” and “soft Brexit” is a false one. If soft Brexit means staying in the single market with no controls on our borders and, crucially, the UK being subject to the European Court of Justice, it is not really Brexit at all. Indeed, I believe I recall the remain campaigners arguing during the referendum campaign that sacrificing EU membership but staying in the single market was the “worst of both worlds”.

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

We are leaving the EU, and that means freeing ourselves of its institutions. But we remain a firm friend and ally of all the European countries with which we have been working over decades to try to maintain peace, prosperity and stability on European soil. Not only do we want to have and will seek an open trading relationship with those countries, but, no matter what the outcome, we will continue to work with them on tackling areas of common interest: terrorism, crime, climate change and environmental protection. This major change in our governance means that Britain can freely reach out to the rest of the world, forging new friendships, building new alliances and expanding into new markets. But, like the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I recognise the disappointment of people who were satisfied with our membership of the EU and wish we were in a different place. I think we have a bright future ahead of us. There is a whole world out there and I want to see a free, open, tolerant self-determining Britain thrive in it. Therefore, I will have no hesitation in going through the Lobby tomorrow in support of the Government and this Bill.

2.35 pm

**Margaret Beckett** (Derby South) (Lab): May I say at once that although I deeply regret the decision made by the British people, including in my constituency, to leave the EU, I do not seek to challenge it? I regret the opening remark made by the Secretary of State—I am sorry he is not here to hear me say this—that this debate is about whether or not we trust the British people. It is not about that; it is about whether we commence the process of implementing their decision, a process that will not be simple, easy or fast. It does no one any favours to pretend otherwise.

Although I accept that decision and I will vote for the Bill, I fear that its consequences, both for our economy and our society, are potentially catastrophic. I therefore hope that the practice of dismissing any calls, queries and concerns, however serious and well founded, as merely demonstrating opposition to the will of the British people will now cease, along with the notion that they would merely obstruct the process. Once we commence this process, there are serious and profound questions to address, and it helps nobody to cheapen it in that way.

A second practice I deplore is that of pretending that the question the public actually answered—whether to leave the European Union or to remain—is instead the question some leave campaigners would prefer them to have answered. I hear many claiming that the people voted to leave the single market—that they voted to leave the customs union. First, those were not the words on the ballot paper. Secondly, although we all have our own recollections of the debate, mine is that whenever we who campaigned to remain raised the concerns that if we were to leave the EU to end the free movement of people, we might, in consequence, find that we have to leave the single market, with massive implications for jobs and our economy, some leave campaigner would immediately pop up to assure the people that no such complications or problems were likely to arise and that we could have—

**John Redwood** *rose*—

**Margaret Beckett:** I am looking at one of them now. They would suggest that we could have our cake and eat it—that we could leave the EU not only without jeopardy to our economy, but even with advantage, because we could negotiate other trading relationships without any such uncomfortable ties.

**John Redwood:** Does the right hon. Lady not remember that the official leave campaign said that one of our main aims is to have many more free trade agreements with the rest of the world and that in order to do that of course we have to leave the single market customs union, because we are not allowed to undertake free trade?

**Margaret Beckett:** No, honestly I do not particularly recall that. I recall those in the leave campaign saying that we could have trading arrangements with a whole lot of other countries, and I am going to turn to that now. India was cited as one example, but I have the distinct impression that when the Prime Minister discussed these issues with the President of India she may have been advised that far from closing the immigration door, he would like to see it opened wider. Nor do I think a trade deal with China will be without any quid pro quo.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Further to that, does my right hon. Friend recall the International Development Secretary making the case to my constituents of Indian descent, of Bangladeshi descent and of Pakistani descent that leaving the EU would not only lead to future trade deals, but would improve immigration to this country from the Commonwealth? Does my right hon. Friend expect that promise to be delivered?

**Margaret Beckett:** I am extraordinarily grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because not only do I recall it, but I originally had it in my speech, only to take it out on the grounds of time.

As for the United States, I am sure that the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who, like me has had a degree of experience in complex international negotiations, is as conscious as I am that one of the first prerequisites is to listen to the words. It was not the President of the United States who said that Britain would be at the front of the queue, it was British politicians. What the President said was, “You’re doing great.” I do not take much comfort from that, especially coming as it does from a President whose motto is “America first.” I wholly share the fears that have been expressed, and that probably will be again in this debate, about the possibility of America’s companies wishing to exploit the healthcare market here or weaken our regulations on, for example, food safety.

The negotiations we will trigger with this Bill will be extraordinarily difficult and very time-consuming. I do not think for a second that they can be concluded within two years, and I do not think anybody who has ever negotiated anything would. It will therefore be vital to make allowance and preparations for possible transitional arrangements.

I am conscious of the time, so I shall make my final point. It is not clear whether the Prime Minister frightened the European Commission with her threat to devastate our tax base and, in consequence, all our public services,

but she successfully frightened me. I do not believe—not for one second—that that is what the British people thought they were voting for. When this process is concluded, the European Parliament will have the right to vote on the outcome. If taking back control means anything, it must mean that this House enjoys the same right.

2.41 pm

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): It is with a heavy heart, and against my long-held belief that the interests of this country are better served by our being a member of the European Union, that I shall support the Bill. In 2015, I promised the good people of Broxtowe that, if I was elected to represent them for another term, and in accordance with my party's manifesto, I would vote for an in/out referendum on our EU membership, agreeing, in the words of David Cameron, that the people would "settle the matter". I promised to respect and honour the vote. On 9 June 2015, along with 544 Members of this place, I agreed to that referendum, and in so doing I agreed to be bound by the result.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) was not in favour of that referendum and did not vote for it, so he is, of course, free and able to vote against the Bill. I am sure it is no coincidence that he happens to enjoy a considerably large number of people in his constituency who voted remain, and that he has—quite wrongly, in my view—announced that he will not be standing again in 2020. I say to Opposition Members, though, that you cannot go back on your word because you do not agree with the result.

I believe that history will not be kind to this Parliament, nor, indeed, to the Government I was so proud to serve in. How on earth did we ever come to put to the people an alternative that we then said would make them worse off and less safe and would weaken our nation? I echo the wise words of some of the speech by my new friend, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), when I say that I greatly fear that generations that either did not vote or are yet to come will not thank us for our great folly. Neither will they forgive those who since 23 June have chosen not to be true to their long-held views—those who have remained mute as our country has turned its back on the benefits of the free movement of people, a single market and the customs union, without a debate, far less any vote in this place. Why is that? It needs to be said and recorded that our Government have decided that the so-called control of immigration, which actually means the reduction in immigration—that is what so many people in our constituencies believe—is worth more than the considerable benefits of the single market and the customs union.

What has been even more upsetting is the fact that Members on the Labour Front Bench have connived with the Government. The Government were never going to give us the opportunity to debate these important matters, for reasons that I genuinely understand and, indeed, respect, but for the Labour party to go against everything it has ever believed in is really quite shameful. It is a combination of incompetence on its Front Bench and a deep division among so many, with a few honourable exceptions—among whom I of course include the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). They have turned their backs on their long-standing belief in the free movement of people and failed to make the positive case for immigration.

The referendum vote exposed a deeply divided Britain, and that has been exposed in no place better than in the Labour party. Labour Members have been petrified—literally frozen to the spot—looking over one shoulder and seeing that their constituency Labour parties have been taken over by the extreme left, and beyond that, in many instances, that up to 70% of their own voters voted leave.

What has happened to our country? Businesses have fallen silent, scared to speak up and to speak out. I think they believe it is all going to be fine—that we are not really going to leave the EU, we will not really leave the single market and we will not really leave the customs union. They are going to get a sharp shock.

**Alberto Costa:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that when she, I and other Members of this House voted, rightly, to give the British people the ultimate say in this matter, we did not vote to take away the rights of EU citizens like my parents who live in this country? It is disgraceful that, as it stands today, we are not honouring their rights.

**Anna Soubry:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend, whom I include among those many brave souls on the Government Benches who, in the face of abuse and even death threats, have stood up and been true to what they believe in.

Why has there been this outbreak of silence? I quote the wise words of Edmund Burke:

"Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field."

That is what has happened, but now it must stop. We must now make sure that everybody is free and able to stand up and say what they believe, and that people no longer cower in fear of four newspapers and this never-ending chorus, which I do not believe represents my constituents.

**Chris Bryant:** We are very grateful on the Labour Benches for all the advice the right hon. Lady is giving us. [*Interruption.*] I am sure her own Back Benches are grateful as well, sometimes.

Was the right hon. Lady a member of the Government who tried to cut net migration to tens of thousands? Did she stand as a Conservative Member in the most recent general election and the one before on a manifesto that pledged to cut net migration to tens of thousands? I just ask.

**Anna Soubry:** I do not think anybody would say that I have not been forthright in putting forward my views about the positive benefits of immigration to our country. The best way that the Government can reduce those figures is, of course, to take out overseas students. If only they would do that; it would be the right thing to do.

Notwithstanding the considerable abilities and efforts of our Prime Minister and Government, as we embark on these negotiations I remain far from convinced that we will get any good deal. Like the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), I do not believe that in two years we will secure a good bespoke deal on

[Anna Soubry]

trade, the customs union and our nation's security. I hope very much to be proved wrong, and I will, of course, support the Prime Minister and our Government as they embark on the most important and difficult set of negotiations in decades, with consequences for generations to come.

What happens if no deal is secured? It is difficult to see how any Government could put to this place a deal that they believe to be inadequate in some way. I want, please, assurances from the Government that, in the event of no good deal being reached, all options will be placed before this House, and that we, on behalf of all our constituents and our businesses, will decide what happens next. We may need more time. We certainly do not want to jump off the cliff into World Trade Organisation tariffs when we are out of the single market and the customs union as that would be dangerous for our businesses in all sectors and of all sizes.

Let us now begin to heal the wounds and the divides, so that we can come together to get the best deal for our country as we leave the European Union.

2.50 pm

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I will, not surprisingly, be wholeheartedly voting to trigger article 50 tomorrow evening. I have also used my judgment. I accept that Lambeth voted overwhelmingly for remain but, as I have made very, very clear, this was a United Kingdom referendum, not a constituency or borough-based referendum. I welcome the many letters that I have received from my constituents—a lot were very pleasant—regretting that I will vote to trigger article 50. I have also had many nasty, venomous letters, not necessarily from my constituents, but from across the country. I resent and deplore the language that has been thrown around over the past few months. It comes not just from one side. There is a tendency to think that it is only the remainers who have had some pretty awful things said about them. Pretty dreadful things have been said by some who voted to remain against people such as me who stood out against our own party. None of it is acceptable. Members all need to do their bit to ensure that we seek to improve the level of political discourse, especially over the years when we are involved in our negotiations.

Like the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I remember the Maastricht treaty debate, when I was a relatively new Member of Parliament. Time after time, the Labour party made us come along to vote against all the amendments but then, when it came to the final vote, we were ordered to abstain.

I welcome the speech made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). I welcome his tone, the graveness of the way in which he put his argument, and his honesty about the difficulty that Labour faces on this issue. I am very pleased that my party has decided not to block the referendum decision; it would be a travesty if we did.

I wish to raise a couple of annoying things that people keep saying. One is that people did not know what they were voting for. It is said that those who voted to leave did not understand what that meant. That really is patronising, and it shows part of the

reason why so many people voted to leave—they were fed up being treated as if they knew nothing and as if those in power knew more than them.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, which means that I have secured her a bit more time. Does she recall that during the course of the referendum—this was certainly my experience, and I hope that it was hers—there was much more engagement, much more questioning, much more interest and a bigger turnout than at any general election in which I have ever been involved? People were really trying to find out what this was all about.

**Kate Hoey:** The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. At the many meetings I spoke at all over the country, there was a fervent interest in the issue. People wanted to know more. I remember hearing the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer very clearly warning—not just warning, but threatening—people that if they dared to vote to leave, the consequences would be our leaving the single market. Let us not call it the single market; it is an internal market. If we are leaving the EU, of course we have to leave the internal market. I am sure that, like any other country outside the EU, we will be able to get a deal that allows us to have access to that market.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kate Hoey:** No, I will not. The right hon. and learned Gentleman had 22 minutes in which to speak.

**Mr Speaker:** It was 17 in fact.

**Kate Hoey:** Mr Speaker, my maths are not as good as yours.

The other matter I want to raise is this idea that if someone voted to leave, they are, if not an outright racist, an indirect racist. It is ridiculous and appalling that the 17 million people who voted to leave are being treated in that way. We know that those people were against not immigrants, but the idea that people from 27 other countries—26 excluding the Republic of Ireland—could come into our country for no other reason than that they could do so. That did not apply to people outside the European Union. We betrayed the people from the Commonwealth so badly back in 1973, yet they had no right to come here. It is all about getting back control. I know that that sounds like a cliché, but it is what we are doing—taking back control of our own country.

Once we have left the European Union, we will probably have sharp disagreements in the House and not so many cross-party views on a lot of the issues. We want to build—I certainly want to build—a post-Brexit UK that looks at spending priorities that might be very different from those proposed by Members on the other side of the House. I want to look at how we can use new freedoms on state aid in our country, and in order to do that, we must trigger article 50 and get into the negotiations. Our businesses and the country generally want us to get on with it. We have left ourselves in a situation in which we are spending two days of debate on a very simple Bill. The amendments will be considered next week, one or two of which I hope the Government will accept, but

the reality is that this is a process that needs to be triggered. We need to do it soon, and the public expect us to do that. I have hope that we can look forward to negotiations that will take this country not to the forbidding place that the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) mentioned—I have no foreboding about our future outside the European Union—but to a bright future. That will happen tomorrow night when we vote to trigger article 50.

2.56 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): People in the UK voted to take back control. They voted to take back control of their laws, their borders and their money. They showed great bravery, a huge passion for democracy and enormous engagement with the many complex issues that were put before them by the two campaigns. They voted by a majority to leave, despite being told that that course would be fraught with danger. They were told that the EU would bully us on the way out, and their answer was, “We will stand up to the bullies.” They were told that the economy would immediately be badly damaged and plunged into a recession this winter; they said that they did not believe the experts. Fortunately, they were right and the experts were wrong.

Now is the time for all of us here to do the difficult task of speaking up for those many constituents who did agree with us and those many constituents who did not. Both sides come together around two central propositions. The first is that we are all democrats. Everyone who is fair-minded knows, in the words of the Government leaflet that was sent to every household, that the people made the decision. That was our offer. That was what our Parliament voted to provide, and that is what the people expect. They also expect us to be greatly respectful of each other’s views. In a democracy, people do not automatically change their view when they have lost the argument and the vote. It is incumbent on those of us on the majority side to listen carefully and to do all that we can to ensure that the genuine worries as well as the inaccurate worries of the remain side can be handled. We all want economic success. Many of us believe that we can deliver that economic success by leaving. Many remain voters will be relieved and will come our way if we can show, in a good spirit, that that is exactly what we will do.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our interlocutors on the other side are listening to and watching this debate very carefully and that sending mixed messages would be against the national interest of this country if we want to get a good deal for both the 52% and the 48%?

**John Redwood**: Indeed. I believe in free speech, but it is in the national interest that we share our worst doubts privately and make a strong presentation to our former partners in the European Union. I believe that business now wants us to do that. The message from business now is, “Get on with it!” It accepts the verdict.

**Margaret Beckett**: A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that all the fears expressed about the impact of the decision have proved to be ill founded. He must have seen the analogy that has been floating around: we are in the position of somebody who has just thrown themselves off a 100-storey building. What storey does he think we are at now?

**John Redwood**: That is not a sensible analogy. We know that the main claims were wrong because we were told that there would be a recession this winter—that the economy would plunge immediately off a cliff. Instead, we were the fastest-growing economy in the G7 throughout last year, and stronger at the end than we had been in the middle.

This is the once and future sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. The thing that most motivated all those voters for leave was that they wanted the sovereignty of this Parliament to be restored. That is what the Bill allows us to do by our exiting the European Union, and then making our own decisions about our laws, our money and our borders. As one who has had to live for many years with an answer from the British people on the European Union that I did not like, I was increasingly faced with an invidious choice. Did I support the position of Government and Opposition Front Benches, which agreed that every European law and decision had to go through because it was our duty to put them through? Alternatively, should I be a serial rebel, complaining about the EU weather which we had no power to change?

I had reached the point where if the country had voted remain, I would have respected that judgment and not sought re-election at the next general election. I would have seen no point in this puppet Parliament—this Parliament that is full of views, airs and graces, but cannot change laws or taxes, or spend money in the way the British people want. That is the liberty that we regained. This Parliament is going to be made great by the people. It is going to be made great despite itself.

**Alberto Costa** *rose*—

**John Redwood**: It is going to be made great because the people understand better than so many of their politicians that sovereignty must rest from the people in this Parliament.

**Alberto Costa** *rose*—

**John Redwood**: And the great news is that we can decide to keep for ourselves all those many good things that, we are told, Europe has given us. All those good laws we will keep; all those employment protections we will agree to continue.

**Alberto Costa** *rose*—

**John Redwood**: The day we leave the European Union will be a great day because everything will change and nothing will change. Everything will change through our power to make our own choices; nothing will change because we will guarantee continuity and allow people the benefits of the laws that we have already inherited. What is it about freedom that some Members do not like? What is it about having power back in our Parliament that they cannot stand? Vote to make the once and future sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom sovereign again. That is what the people challenge you to do!

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker**: Order. Mr Costa, I say to you gently that you should remember the merits of keeping a safe distance.

3.3 pm

**Dame Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab): I am rather nervous about following that extraordinary double-act.

The debate has shown once again how important it is for Parliament to scrutinise properly the Government's approach and actions in respect of leaving the European Union. It has made the Government's attempts to thwart that scrutiny through the Supreme Court look even more ludicrous.

I want to make four points. First, I shall support the Bill. I did not want us to leave the European Union, but the majority of those who voted in the referendum thought differently, including nearly 70% of people in Doncaster Central. It is important that we respect that decision, as was stated so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and the shadow Secretary of State.

Secondly, we must do all that we can to get the best deal for Britain from the negotiations. That deal must benefit all parts of the UK. The Government have focused on strategies for Scotland, Wales, London and Northern Ireland, but we need to make sure that all our regions have input and a proper analysis of the effects of leaving the European Union.

People in Yorkshire and Humber want to know what the effect will be on our businesses—small and large—universities, science and technology sectors, local authorities, trade unions, representatives of the third sector and others in our region. During proceedings on a recent statement, the Secretary of State said that the other nations would of course be involved in those discussions, adding that he would also be inviting representatives from the regions to a meeting in York. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us more detail about exactly how that will work. Who will represent the Yorkshire region? Will any analysis be done of the effect of Brexit on Yorkshire, what we will need to see from any deal, and how an ongoing dialogue will be maintained? Each nation and region will have an interest not only in trade deals, but in the Government's so-called great repeal Bill.

My third point is about employees' rights and conditions. The Government have said that they will guarantee that current employment rights will be incorporated into UK law once we have left the EU, but they need to go further by strengthening UK employment law if they are to deal with the issues of undercutting and exploitation. British manufacturing, the agricultural industry and our public services, especially the NHS, will need workers—skilled and unskilled—from European Union countries.

Concern about immigration was a key factor in many people's minds during the referendum. A lot of that concern revolved around a feeling that workers' wages and conditions were being undercut by migrants, especially those from eastern Europe. I know from my constituency that many of those workers are on zero-hours contracts, often being offered only about 10 hours' work a week even though they want to work for longer, and at the minimum wage—sometimes even below it. The employers are not just about breaking even; they are big companies that often use agencies to supply their workers and effectively use the state—through housing benefit, for example—to subsidise cheap labour while seeing big profit margins.

Some call some of that a form of modern slavery. We need to use the opportunity before us to look again at how the labour market operates. If the Government are to address the concerns that I have set out, they will have to improve the whole way in which our labour market works. I believe that countries across Europe have concerns about this issue and we will be discussing it at the Labour party conference on Brexit in a few weeks' time. It would help if we could talk to our European neighbours about the issue in respect of gaining as much access as we can to the single market.

My final point is that, as we saw yesterday, huge concern has been expressed in this country and throughout the world about the actions of President Trump. That has shown how essential it is that the UK does not withdraw from the world stage because of Brexit. I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Last week, I saw at the Assembly how valuable it was to show that the UK has not withdrawn into itself, and that we understand the importance of working with our European neighbours and advancing our common cause on human rights. I know that Government Members feel strongly about that issue as well.

I hope that the Minister will reassure the House, once and for all, that the Government will not be withdrawing from the European convention on human rights and the Council of Europe. We need to lead the debate on how we leave the European Union, and the Bill should be an opportunity to do that.

3.9 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The speech made by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) was one of the best speeches I have ever heard from the Labour Front Bench in its tone, its honest acceptance of the difficult choices being made by all of us in this House and its fundamental acceptance that we, by a majority of six to one, passed a decision to the people that we have to respect. This debate is simply about facilitating that, which is why so many of us will ensure that there is a large majority tomorrow evening to vote in favour of triggering the process for which our people asked.

I will also follow—some may think, rather counterintuitively—the other remarks of the hon. and learned Gentleman who led for the Labour party. I sincerely believe that this process is not a triumph of nationalism, or of us being apart from them. It is quite the opposite: part of a new internationalism and recognition of our common citizenship of the whole world. We stand ready to break free of the protectionist barriers erected by the EU that have so damaged much of the third world, and rejoin the world at large. As a former Prime Minister of Australia said, "Britain is back."

Of course, we crave the familiar—self, family, friends, village, county, country or even continent—but we know that the human race is one and that human dignity is indivisible. That dignity has not been respected in our continent in the past. By the spring of 1945, Europe had descended into such a spiral of hate, war and destruction that people understandably despaired. Noble spirits such as Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi understood that the familiar divisions of home, tribe and nation were so dangerous when exaggerated that they needed to be not abolished, but overcome, in a

process that became the European Union. No longer would one nation be able to use iron and steel for its own chauvinistic, fratricidal and destructive ends. Then came the freedoms of travel and work. That is why they set the project in motion.

**Alberto Costa:** My hon. Friend and I are executive officers of the all-party parliamentary group for Italy, and we both went to Rome but a few months ago. Does he agree that, although we will respect the will of the British people, that does not include changing the rights of Italians and other EU nationals who have been lawfully resident in the United Kingdom for years? Will he confirm that that is his view?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Of course I will confirm that that is my view. It is also the view of everyone to whom we spoke in the Italian Parliament and in the British Parliament. Our Government have made that absolutely clear.

The point that I am trying to make is that, at the time I was describing, the British Parliament, under the leadership of Attlee and Churchill, understood that this was a supranational movement, which is why they did not join. All the discussions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which we can read about, talked about an ever-closer union. It was not the Council of Europe, in which the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) serves and in which I had the privilege of serving. The EU is not a body of sovereign nations. It is bound by a single court of justice. That is why our predecessors took the decision not to join in 1957, and they were right to do so.

Our predecessors were desperate to try to conclude a free trade agreement with our European friends and if they had been offered that free trade agreement in Messina, they would have signed up to it. That is precisely what we are trying to achieve. We are trying to be internationalist and to further free trade. This country is not, and never must be, protectionist or small-minded. Indeed, de Gaulle had an understanding of our point of view, when he talked about a “Europe of nations”. He asked how Great Britain, a maritime power with large and prosperous daughters all over the world, could fit into the Europe that was being created. An amusing cartoon from 1962 by the Dutch cartoonist Opland shows European Economic Community leaders faced with the prospective arrival of big mother Britannia with her diverse progeny of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The caption reads, “If I join, can my offspring too?” Of course, the answer was no. We were already part of a worldwide community of nations, which we called, and still call, the Commonwealth.

What we are now trying to achieve is similar but even more ambitious. We want to lead this worldwide drive towards free trade. In 200 years’ time, people will view Brexit not as the last gasp of an outdated nationalism, but as the advent of a new internationalism. We understand the sincerity with which our remain friends put their arguments, but we are disappointed that they do not seem to want to grasp the immense globalism of Brexit—of escaping the EU barriers and looking beyond the ocean to take the mantle of solidarity with the rest of the world. Yes, we want our European friends to succeed. We are definitely not engaged in 19th-century rivalries and scrambles, nor board games of Risk and Diplomacy. In all sincerity and with sympathy for their views, we believe that this is an opportunity for us and them.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Of course I will give way to my friend, the Chair of the International Trade Committee.

**Mr MacNeil:** My friend talks about opportunities for globalisation through Brexit, but for globalisation to occur, somebody needs to reciprocate. Who will be the major reciprocators of the change of attitude that has emerged in the UK in the past six to eight months?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I accept that there will be trials along the way, but what is the harm in trying to lead by example? What is the harm of believing in true internationalism and international free trade, and leading the world in it? That is all we are asking.

A free trade deal can be concluded so quickly. We have harmonised our laws for 40 years. It is only politics that prevents our European friends from concluding a free trade deal with us. I say to the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central, in all sincerity, that we do not want to create a bargain basement economy in which we lessen workers’ rights. On the contrary, such is the strength of our economy, innovation and industries that surely we can enshrine a gold standard protecting our workers as well as our fields, forest, rivers and seas. There is nothing, apart from politics, to stop our European friends rapidly sorting out a free trade deal in goods and services. There has never been so easy a free trade deal.

I appeal to my French cousins—not figurative ones, but literal ones—living in Provence and Paris. We want to strengthen our links, not dissolve them, in an amity of nations. On the way, we have to ensure that we enshrine security, control of borders and all those things but, for the positive and international reasons I have given, many Members of Parliament will be proud to vote for this tomorrow evening.

3.18 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Tomorrow evening, my colleagues and I will vote to ensure that the process of leaving the European Union is commenced by the triggering of article 50. I have always believed that we were much better off in an arrangement where the people of the United Kingdom elected representatives to express their views and make decisions about them exclusively in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

In the history of our involvement in the EU, time and again detrimental laws were passed by people who were not part of our country and were not elected in our country. In my role as a councillor and in the Northern Ireland Assembly, we were told, time and again, “These measures might not be suitable for Northern Ireland and may have consequences that were perhaps not even intended by the people who wrote them. Nevertheless, you don’t even have a say in whether these laws should be taken into consideration. You simply have to sign them off.”

I campaigned in the referendum to leave the EU, and I am pleased that my constituents, by 55% to 45%, took my advice—that is more than vote for me in a general election, so I even persuaded some of my detractors that it was the correct thing to do.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene when he was about to get into full flow. He and his colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party know perfectly well that a clear majority of the Northern Ireland electorate voted for the UK to remain within the EU. A majority of my constituents in North Down voted to remain. How do he and his party colleagues propose to respect that fact in their voting tomorrow evening, and indeed in their negotiations with the Brexit Secretary?

**Sammy Wilson:** The hon. Lady leads me neatly on to my next point.

When I campaigned in the referendum, I campaigned as a Member of the UK Parliament, which passed a law for a referendum that had national implications and would be judged on a national basis, not on a narrow regional basis of Northern Ireland having a different say from the rest of the people of the United Kingdom. I would have thought that as a Unionist the hon. Lady would respect the fact that this was a UK referendum and therefore the outcome had to be judged on a UK basis. It would be detrimental to the Union if Northern Ireland—or Scotland or Wales—had the right to say to the people of the whole of the United Kingdom, “We don’t care how you voted. The 1.8 million people in Northern Ireland have a right to veto how the rest of the people in the United Kingdom expressed their view.” I therefore would not accept that that could be the case.

**Ian Blackford:** We are not seeking to impose a veto on the people of the United Kingdom. The people of the United Kingdom have voted to leave, and we respect that. We have asked that Westminster respect our situation of having voted to remain, as one of the family of nations. Why will the UK Government not support our right to remain within the single market?

**Sammy Wilson:** Of course, it depends on how you dress up that request.

The Government have made it clear that they want to hear about the concerns and issues that affect not just Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but other regions of England, and particular industries as well. Indeed, they have set up mechanisms to do so. There are numerous conversations and discussions between officials within Departments. There is the Joint Ministerial Committee where politicians from the different countries that make up the United Kingdom can express their views. There are ministerial meetings. Not only that, but in the case of Northern Ireland the Government have made a commitment—

**Mr MacNeil** *rose*—

**Sammy Wilson:** No, I will not give way again.

The Government have had very good contacts with the Irish Republic because there are issues between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

For those reasons, we will be voting in support of the outcome of the referendum. I accept that some people in this House probably do have the right to be exempt from looking at what the people of the United Kingdom said and voting against it, because they were opposed to a referendum. However, many in this House who will be voting against the Bill tomorrow evening will be saying,

“We voted for a referendum that gave people in the United Kingdom a right to express a view that will be binding, and now we simply disregard that.” They do not have a right to do that. That is where the line should be drawn.

The former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), said that people did not know what they were voting for. Well, there is no excuse for people in this House not knowing what they are voting for now, because the Prime Minister has made that very clear in 6,000 words. During the referendum campaign, the people of the United Kingdom knew what they were voting for. Those who were voting to remain tried to scare the devil out of them. They told them that all kinds of horrors were going to beset them—that within a couple of days they would be eating dry bread and having to drink water, and losing their jobs—and still they voted to leave. Voting to leave meant that if we were going to have the freedom to make our own laws, we could not be part of the single market, because being part of the single market meant that somebody else made the laws. When people voted to leave, they knew they were voting to leave the customs union, because our future rests with those parts of the globe where there are expanding economies, not the part where, because of restrictive policies, the economy is contracting. People knew what they were voting for.

It has been argued that we should be thinking of the future of young people. I think that many young people listening to the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam would not believe what he was saying. This is a man who promised, “You will have fee-free education”, and then imposed fees on them. This is a man who voted, and whose party voted, for greater Government debt that will be paid for by young people out of their taxes in future. We would have found that had we remained in the EU as well.

**Anna Soubry:** Would the hon. Gentleman accept my word, and no doubt that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), that when we stood in Loughborough market on the day of the referendum, almost overwhelmingly everybody said to us that they were voting leave to get the immigrants out? That is the reality of the leave campaign.

**Sammy Wilson:** I can tell the right hon. Lady what my constituents voted for. They voted to make sure that the EU’s interference in our affairs was ended and that we made a decision about immigration policy, we made a decision about economic policy, we made a decision about environmental policy—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I have been very generous to the hon. Gentleman, even though he seems blissfully unaware of the fact.

3.27 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): As Attorney General, I had plenty of opportunities to witness some of the problems attendant on EU membership, including the difficulties of achieving harmony when there are 28 member states, of the ways in which rules could be applied, and, at times, of the irksome sclerosis that pervaded it as an organisation. I have to say, however,

that at no time did I have any doubt that being a member of the European Union was in our national interest. In the months that have elapsed since the referendum, I have never taken the view that my opinion has any reason to change on this matter whatsoever. On the contrary, it seems to me that as the months go by it becomes clearer that the challenges we face in leaving the European Union are going to be very considerable.

We reassure ourselves that we wish to globalise and to look outwards. I never thought there was any problem in looking outwards from within the European Union in the first place. But as we go and spend time trying to get trade deals with third countries outside the European Union, it becomes manifestly obvious that each one of those will carry its own cost, and that that cost will often go beyond just economic issues and into values as well. That is what has always worried me most of all about the decision to leave. Although we are insistent, and rightly so, that we wish to continue close co-operation with our European partners, the reality is that we are embarking on producing a series of obstacles to understanding, and that means that we will be perceived as turning our back on countries who are not only our closest neighbours but in reality, as becomes manifestly more obvious with every passing year, share our values in a very developed fashion. That is not to say that that is exceptional—there are other countries that do so outside the EU—but these are key relationships for the wellbeing of our citizens and our national security. The only thing that has given me comfort during this period is that the speech by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a week or so ago seemed to me to set out very clearly an understanding of the challenges that we face and an intention to pursue a policy that, if it can be carried out—I have to say that I think it is going to be of considerable difficulty—would place the United Kingdom at the least disadvantage from its decision to leave.

So far as triggering article 50 is concerned, I take the view that I will support the Government in doing so, despite my deep concerns. That comes from two things. One, as has already been cited by others, is that I supported the referendum and, by implication, indicated that I would honour the decision that the electorate made. Even if I had not, one of the reasons why we are sent to this place is to pursue the national interest by looking at the widest considerations. I cannot see, at present, how continuing with political uncertainty would be in the national interest, if we tried to obstruct the decision that the electorate so clearly made.

That brings me to what we should try to do in this Bill. Many amendments have been tabled, many of which seem to me to involve micromanagement of the negotiating process, which is something that this Parliament cannot readily do. But I do worry about process. It may sound legalistic, but process, in my experience, matters enormously because it enables one to focus in a sensible way on the issues that arise. It worried me deeply that the Government—leave aside the legalities of the matter and the Supreme Court decision—seemed at the start of the process to want to deprive the House of a say in triggering article 50. In the same way, I worry very much that we should have a proper process to help to engage the House and the country in what we are going to do. We still do not have a White Paper, and I say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that that

White Paper has got to be there before we come to the Committee stage. Without it, we cannot have the informed debate that we will need to have at that stage.

Looking forward much further, there will come a time when the Government return to the House and ask for its approval of what they have succeeded in negotiating. Of course, they do not have to do so, because of the way in which conventions operate in foreign affairs. But I have to say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that that has to happen before the matter goes to the European Parliament for ratification, if that is the deal that has been agreed. Those seem to me to be the two benchmarks that we will need if we are to maintain the support that the House needs to give to the Government if the negotiations are to lead to a satisfactory outcome.

I started my political career by campaigning for the “Keep Britain in Europe” campaign in 1974, so I cannot say that I am unemotional about this issue. I think we have made a grave error, and I think it is one that will become more and more apparent with the passage of time. In the meantime, the national interest is that we should all try to work together to achieve the best possible outcome for our country.

3.33 pm

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who, as ever, made some cogent points about the importance of process. I completely agree with him that the Government must lay out a process by which this House can begin to have a say in the proceedings and on the final deal.

I stand up today to talk with passion about the biggest constitutional change to this country in my lifetime and in several generations. I regret that I do not believe that we will reverse this decision, but I will not be supporting it. That is not because I do not recognise the result of the referendum. I cannot walk blindly through a Lobby to trigger a process without a shred of detail from the Government. There has been much talk of the Prime Minister’s speech—made not in this House, but elsewhere—but no White Paper and no detail. After seven months, it is really shocking that the Government can come to the House today and say so little.

There is still no real guarantee of parliamentary oversight. Although there was a vote to leave, there is a lot more detail below that decision that the House has a constitutional role to play in delivering. There is no certainty for business, as we stand here, and businesses in my constituency are very concerned about their future. There has been not a word of succour for EU citizens resident in the UK, an issue I have raised with the Prime Minister. There has been no answer about how the many regulations that will need to be transposed into our law will be dealt with. I suspect that we will see an explosion, at speed, of quangos. This is the same Government who wanted a bonfire of the quangos.

In the short time that I have, I want to focus my comments on EU citizens resident in the UK. At the last census in 2011, around 10% of my constituents were born in other EU countries. That was the case for about 27,000 residents across the Borough of Hackney, and the percentage is similar across London as a whole, where 841,000 people were born in other EU countries. If we look at student numbers, we see that 31,000 students

[Meg Hillier]

from the EU were accepted in 2016, up 22% from 2010. That is a significant bunch of people who are contributing to our economy.

We cannot get figures for everywhere in our public services, but 5% of NHS staff UK-wide are from other EU countries. In 2015-16, nearly 11% of staff who joined the NHS were from European Union member states other than the UK. That has gone up from nearly 7% in 2012-13. That demonstrates that there is a big gap between our skills in this country and the skills and talents that we need to fill those jobs.

Let us look at the tech sector. I am proud to represent Old Street and Shoreditch, which is home to a burgeoning tech sector. Approximately 184,200 EU nationals work in tech. There are already issues with visas in this sector, because it is such a modern and emerging global industry. Often, jobs do not have titles—they do not exactly exist, in official terms—and there are real issues about where we get that talent from. Cutting off overnight the stream of EU citizens, who may be asked to leave this country, is a real issue.

Overall, 3 million EU citizens live and work in the UK. Those people pay more in tax than they withdraw in benefits, and they contribute at least £2 billion annually to our economy. A recent poll by BMG showed that a majority of UK residents believed that EU citizens' rights should be guaranteed, with 58% agreeing with that position, 28% disagreeing and 14% saying “don't know”. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) talked about the human misery that this is causing. I have had people ringing my office in tears because they are worried about their future. When I am on doorsteps talking to constituents, they cannot hold back their emotions, because they are fearful about what it will mean. What about the woman who wrote to me recently—a Dutch woman with a British partner and British children, who has spent 20 years in this country but does not know her future? What about another woman who is worried that, because she is a freelancer, she will not be able to stay in the UK?

Changing this issue would not require an amendment to the Bill; the Government could agree to it straight away. We should be very wary of turning on foreigners in our midst at this time. Instead, we should give them succour. The Government should do so in the next few days, allowing such citizens to stay and continue to contribute to our country and setting in train the process by which they have to do it. If we do not do so, we should look very closely at our tolerances in this country.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very powerful point. I actually think it is tantamount to torture not to tell people from the EU living and working in this country that they can stay, as it is for British people living and working in the European Union. Does she not believe that both sides ought to get together as quickly as possible and put people out of their misery by telling them that they are allowed to stay, to live and to work in the countries where they currently are?

**Meg Hillier:** I agree with that position, but I believe the Government could go further and make a unilateral declaration. These people live in our midst, they are our

friends and our neighbours, they work in our public services, they are contributing to our economy, and I believe that people who are exercising their treaty rights today should be allowed to stay. They have made their lives in this country with every expectation that that would be the permanent position, and I think it would be magnanimous of the Government to give way now.

3.39 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): In my opinion, the people have decided, and I am going to vote accordingly.

3.39 pm

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I thought that I had earned myself a reputation for brevity, but I think I have been resoundingly beaten. I offer the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) my congratulations.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Con): You can sit down now.

**Ms Stuart:** Tempting as that invitation is, I will not take it up.

This is an historic debate. It is immensely historic not because of what we as Members of Parliament will do, but because of what the people did on 23 June 2016. They have now given us the task of implementing that decision—to avoid any arguments about the figures, let us just say that the Bill is less than 150 words long—and we are now charged to do so because the people told us to leave.

When the people told us to leave, there were some broad principles behind what they said. The first principle is that parliamentary sovereignty does not mean being sovereign over the people. It is about the relationship between the sovereign and Parliament. We are representatives in a parliamentary democracy, but when we decide to have a direct mandate, it is our duty to implement that direct mandate. I would not for one moment pretend that it is easy to adapt the structures, but that is our challenge.

The second principle relates to the fact that there was a 72.2% turnout. It is absolutely true that just over 16 million people voted to remain, but more people voted to leave. It is now our duty to do two things: to implement the decision of the majority; and immediately afterwards, to focus on representing the people as a whole.

I chaired the official leave campaign. The leave campaign was clear that it was about taking back control of our borders. That meant we wanted an immigration policy based not on geography, but on skills and economic need. We wanted to take back control of our laws and of our trade negotiations. I also happen to think that the Government should actually honour the election pledge that was made that at least £100 million a week—money saved from not making direct contributions to the EU—should go to the NHS, which is short of money.

That brings me to the nature of article 50, which is where history is important. I was the draftsman—or draftswoman—of the original provision that led to article 50. It was actually an expulsion clause in the draft European constitution, which said that any country

that did not ratify the European constitution would be asked to leave within two years. It is in the nature of the European Union that anything on the drawing board is never allowed to go away, and it became a leaving clause—hence the period of two years—but nobody seriously thought through how it should be implemented. The challenge for us is therefore to do what has not as yet been imagined. All the current structures are designed for countries to move increasingly closer, not to leave the European Union, but we are leaving.

Numerous speakers have referred to nationalism, but one of the reasons why the United Kingdom is in a unique position is that, under George I, the British Isles developed a concept of supranationalism. That is why someone like me—I was born in Munich—can say with great comfort that I am British, although I will never be English. The British people have therefore never felt the need to overcome the darker side of nationalism with supranationalism. At the same time, there is one thing, which we have not mentioned, that makes the whole European Union debate different. Various people have relived their youth, but when the euro was introduced, the whole dynamics of the European Union and its relationship to countries that said they would not join the single currency changed. I regard the outcome of the referendum as a logical conclusion of Maastricht. We said that we would not join the single currency and the Schengen common travel area. In the negotiations, we could not come to a deal to accommodate that.

I chair Change Britain, which we set up after the referendum. It is important, irrespective of how we voted, to bring people together. We have been working on a number of principles, including—I welcome what was said from the Government Front Bench—enshrining workers' rights. It is equally important to enshrine environmental rights and ensure our communities are protected. It is extremely important for us on the Labour side to realise that we now have to fight for the Labour heartlands that never recovered from the 1980s.

It is also extremely important to protect the rights of EU citizens. Let us remember that, of the 2.8 million EU citizens living here, approximately 1.8 million have already established their right to be here. It is those who have been here for less than five years whom we really need to protect.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I might support unilateralism, but does the right hon. Lady concede, given the Government's policy, that the only obstacle to guaranteeing reciprocal rights is that our European partners have dogmatically insisted on no negotiating before notification?

**Ms Stuart:** There is a rational case for what the hon. Gentleman says, but as we enter negotiations that is the one area where a unilateral decision on our part would set a tone for those negotiations that would serve EU citizens and UK citizens living in the EU.

I want to finish with one basic observation. I take a different view. I do not think it is economic success and peace that deliver us liberal democracies. I will not trade liberal democratic structures for anything else. I believe that it is liberal democratic structures that deliver economic success and peace. Therefore, a new modern 21st-century economic liberal democratic structure would give us that democracy and that peace. That is why I hope everyone in this House will vote to trigger article 50.

3.46 pm

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart). As a founding MP of the Vote Leave campaign, she played a splendid role—as did the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey)—in winning the referendum. It was a brave thing to do. I would also like to pay tribute to my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who for decades has been traduced, reviled and mocked for his views. Notwithstanding, he has kept his ducks in a row and today must be a very proud day for him.

I remind those who intend to vote against the motion tomorrow that this has been the result of a very clearly marked out process. David Cameron made a clear commitment in his Bloomberg speech to have a referendum if the Conservatives won the election. It was a manifesto commitment. We did win the election. The House then passed the Referendum Bill, 544 votes to 53, with a massive majority of 491. Then we had the referendum.

There have been some unwise comments. I have the hugest admiration for my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), but I think he is unwise to have said that the referendum was just an opinion poll. The famous document that cost taxpayers £9 million very clearly stated:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

If that was not clear, the then Prime Minister David Cameron said on many occasions, including on the “Andrew Marr Show” one Sunday in early June:

“What the British public will be voting for is to leave the EU and leave the single market.”

That was helpfully endorsed by a predecessor of the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), the noble Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon, who said:

“I will forgive no one who does not respect the sovereign voice of the British people once it is spoken, whether it is a majority of 1% or 20%.”

Well, it was a big vote: 17,410,742 people voted to leave—the most votes for any issue or party in our history, and the highest percentage turnout since the 1992 general election. I thought, therefore, that the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) were wise and thoughtful. He recognised that the establishment faced a conundrum. We have had referendums—in 1975, in Wales, in Scotland, in Northern Ireland, on the alternative vote—but every time the popular vote delivered what the establishment wanted. This is a unique moment in our history. We have had this massive vote, and the establishment does not want it.

I ask those who are going to vote against the Bill tomorrow night to think of the shattering, catastrophic damage to the integrity of the political establishment, the media establishment and, following the judgment last week, the judicial establishment, if this is not delivered. I am quite clear on this point, having travelled all over the country during the referendum campaign and having campaigned for withdrawal since my earliest days in Parliament. Incidentally, my European credentials are good: I was in business for 20 years, I have visited virtually every European country, I rose to become president of a European trade association. One does not need to stand and sing “Ode to Joy”—

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Does my right hon. Friend speak French and German?

**Mr Paterson:** I chaired the meetings in French, and we translated for the Germans when they could not keep up.

I saw at the time the extraordinary growth of young economies elsewhere in the world, and I saw that we were being held back. It is tragic now to see how Europe is falling behind. Everyone bangs on about our sales to Europe and the single market. Our sales were 61% of our trade in 1999, they have now fallen to 43% and they will fall to 35%.

There are wonderful opportunities out there in the three main areas for which I have had ministerial responsibility. First, on Northern Ireland, I bitterly resent the comments about this damaging the peace process. We have, and will continue to have, the very best relations with the Republic of Ireland, and we will respect the common travel area and all that is good, but we need to revive the economy of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, it is hard to think of two areas of government activity more damaged by European government than the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We will now return responsibility for those areas to a person at that Dispatch Box whom we can hold responsible. As Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I would come here and lamely say, "I'm a democratically elected Minister, but I cannot change this because we were outvoted." For now on, responsibility will lie with elected persons accountable to this Parliament.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has heard the fishing industry complaining about the disadvantage it has faced under the CFP over the last 40 years?

**Mr Paterson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She invited me to Cornwall last summer. In a hotly fought contest, the CFP is the most dreadful, the most shatteringly bad act of misgovernment. It is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster, and it cannot be reformed. Once we get power back to a Minister at that Dispatch Box, we can start holding them to account, and we can learn the lessons of the CFP, as I did in an Opposition green paper in 2005, after having travelled across the north Atlantic, to Norway, the Faroes, Iceland and Newfoundland, and then down to the Falklands. We can bring in modern technology and get away from the disgusting relic that is the quota system, which ensures that a quarter of fish are thrown back dead—no one really knows, but it can be 1 million tonnes and worth £1.6 billion annually.

Finally, there are also advantages for the environment. We are proud signatories to the Bern convention and the Ramsar convention, but those should be interpreted not at a European level, but specifically for our own environment. So we will gain in agriculture, in fisheries and on the environment, and I will be voting tomorrow for the Bill.

3.53 pm

**Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): It took the Supreme Court to remind us that we live in a parliamentary democracy. It is true that Parliament decided that we should have a referendum, and I find it

difficult not to respect the outcome of the vote, but Parliament did not cut itself out of the issue altogether. It did not divest itself of involvement in determining what should happen when the UK withdraws from the EU, which is what the Bill enables. We are discussing the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, not the Maastricht treaty—which, by the way, had 23 days of debate in Committee—or the Lisbon treaty, the Amsterdam treaty or the Single European Act. This Bill is more important than all those Bills wrapped together and multiplied by a large factor.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Chris Leslie:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

That is why we should look carefully at what this Bill says. This Bill says, grudgingly, that Ministers will come and get permission from Parliament for the notification, but then they try to yank it right back to the Prime Minister, so that it is entirely, 100% back in the hands of Ministers alone to determine our fate outside the European Union. That is why I just cannot bring myself to vote in favour of this Bill: there are so many issues, so many ramifications and so many questions surrounding our withdrawal from the European Union that it is our duty—it is what the Supreme Court insisted we should do—to ensure due diligence and look at all the issues surrounding this question.

That is why I have decided to table a few, very judicious amendments to the Bill, to try to cover off a few corners of the questions that I think it needs to address. What will happen, for example, in our relationship with the single market? What are we doing for potentially tariff-free access or frictionless trade across the rest of Europe? Will we be able to have such advantages again? These are the questions that were not on the ballot paper, which simply asked whether we should remain in or leave the European Union. The ballot paper did not go into all those details, which are for Parliament to determine. It is for us as Members of Parliament to do our duty by performing scrutiny and ensuring that we give a steer to Ministers—that we give them their instructions on how we should be negotiating our withdrawal from the European Union.

I personally do not have faith in the Prime Minister's vision for a hard Brexit—because it is a hard Brexit. We may currently be falling very gently through the air, like the skydiver who has jumped out of the aeroplane—"What seems to be the problem? We're floating around"—but I worry about the impact. I worry about hitting the ground and the effect not just on our democracy, but on our constituents and their jobs and on the growth that we ought to be enjoying in the economy to keep pace with our competitors worldwide.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend is giving an excellent speech. Will he confirm the view, which is held quite widely on the Opposition Benches, that absolutely critical to a successful Brexit will be membership of the single market?

**Chris Leslie:** Absolutely, and it beggars belief that we will not even be given the opportunity to debate that in this legislative process—a process, by the way, that the Government are so afraid to go into that they have

given it a measly three days in Committee, an eighth of the time given to scrutinise the provisions of the Maastricht treaty. If they were not so frightened of debate, they would allow the House to go through all these questions. What happens to EU nationals? Will they have rights to stay? It should be for Parliament to determine these things. Are we going to have a transitional arrangement, so that we do not fall off that cliff edge when we get to 1 April 2019? What about visa-free travel? What happens to the financial services trade? It may not face tariffs; it may face a ban on trading altogether in various different areas.

For the Prime Minister to have already accepted the red lines of the other European Union 27 countries—for her to have thrown in the towel on single market membership without even trying to adapt free movement and find a consensus, which I think would be available—is a failure of her approach at the outset. For her to accept the red line that we are not allowed to have parallel discussions and negotiations—that we can only do the divorce proceedings in these two years and then maybe talk about the new relationship—is a failure of the negotiations.

**Anna Soubry:** Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the Prime Minister showed great reality in her speech a few weeks ago when she made it clear that if we do not accept free movement—as indeed she has made clear—then we cannot be a member of the single market? That is just the reality.

**Chris Leslie:** I very much respect the right hon. Lady's contribution—she is an independent thinker on these issues—but I would not give up on the single market that easily. I think we should have at least asked and tried; that is what a negotiation is. We should not just accept the red lines set down by those on the other side of the table. We should go in and try to adapt it. No one should try to convince me that Germany, Italy and Greece, for example, are not facing issues that might lead them to want a more managed migration system. I think it could have been possible, if only we had had a little bit more ambition.

I believe that we should have had a bit more fight in this particular process in an attempt to salvage some of the advantages we need for future generations, let alone for today's economy. I would like to see more fight from all Members of Parliament, and I would like to see more fight from our own leadership in the Labour party on this question. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation for a generation, and our children and future generations will look back on this moment and say, "What did you do to try to nudge the Prime Minister off her hard Brexit course; what did you do to try to steer the course of the Government negotiations away from the rocks and stop them falling over the cliff edge?"

I cannot bring myself to back this Bill, but I will not be dissuaded from doing my duty of trying to amend the Bill and to improve the process so that we get the right deal for Britain. That is our duty, and I urge all parliamentarians to use the Bill wisely in that respect. It might look like an innocuous sentence and a simple clause, but it has phenomenal ramifications, and if we do not try our best to come together across the parties to save some elements of the single market and salvage

some of the benefits of tariff-free trade for all our businesses and our constituents, we will have failed massively in our duty as parliamentarians.

4.1 pm

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): After more than three hours of debate, a great deal of what needed to be said on either side has been said, and I do not intend to bore the House by repeating it. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I voted to remain; unlike him, I voted to promote the referendum and indeed played some part in bringing the Conservative party to the point of committing to a referendum. I shall therefore obviously vote tonight in favour of triggering article 50 in line with the outcome of that referendum. I shall also vote in the succeeding week against each and every attempt through amendments of whatever kind to bind the Government in any way—administratively or legally—because the Government must have the ability to negotiate flexibly and in the national interest.

In the brief minutes allowed, I would like to add one point that I do not think has so far come out of the debate: what we are doing if, as I suspect, we vote tomorrow night to trigger article 50. There has been some suggestion in some speeches that, somehow or other, this vote is not irrevocable or final, and that there will come a time when Parliament can decide whether it likes the deal that the Government have negotiated or whether it prefers instead to go back to the position of remaining in the EU. That is clearly contrary to what the Prime Minister set out in her speech, when she made it perfectly clear that, in her view, what Parliament will then be deciding is whether to accept the deal or not to accept it, in which case we will have to fall back on the WTO and other such arrangements because we will in any case leave.

I want to make it clear why I think the Prime Minister was right about that from three points of view. The first is the question of legal fact. None of us in this House is qualified to make a judgment about the law in that respect, but we have a piece of luck, which is that the Supreme Court has made a judgment on that. In the judgment of the High Court—a rather unusual High Court as it was composed—it was not totally clear, but in the Supreme Court judgment it was totally clear that the presumption of the minority as well as the majority was that this was an irrevocable act. The whole foundation of the legal case was that.

**Mr Bone:** My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech, but was it not agreed in the High Court that both sides accepted that it was irrevocable, so that the Supreme Court did not look at that question?

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but it seems to me that the difference between the two judgments is that the Supreme Court made it clear that in an irrevocable act, what was happening in its view was a fundamental change in our constitution, which is a different character of argument from what was made in the High Court judgment—and it seems to me conclusive. It means that the Supreme Court has ruled that, in its view, this is an irrevocable act.

In a sense, that is irrelevant to us, because we are a Parliament and not a group of lawyers. So we come next to the question of the democratic mandate. Is there

[Sir Oliver Letwin]

a democratic mandate requiring that, when article 50 is triggered, the result—whatever it may be; an acceptable deal or a non-acceptable deal—should be that this country leaves?

In that regard, I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) and one of two others who spoke in similar terms were right. In fact, I know they were right, because I am one of the guilty men. During the referendum campaign, I made it perfectly clear to the many audiences whom I addressed that, in my view—and this is part of the reason why I voted to remain—an inevitable consequence of leaving the EU would be leaving the single market, we would have to reassert our control of the borders which would be incompatible with the single market, we would seek to negotiate with the rest of the world, and therefore we would have to leave the customs union. I made it perfectly clear that we might find ourselves unable to negotiate a free trade agreement—because that takes two sides, and it is impossible for one side to guarantee what the other side will do—and that therefore we might have to fall back on the WTO, which I think would be greatly to the disadvantage of this country.

I made all that clear, so it seems to me, when it comes to the question of the democratic mandate, that the people who voted to leave were voting with their eyes wide open, knowing that the consequence might be our falling back on the WTO. I should add, to be fair, that the leave campaign—or, at least, the more responsible and sensible people in the leave campaign—made that perfectly clear as well. It seems to me that, both as a matter of legal fact and in the context of a democratic mandate, there is an extraordinarily strong argument for believing that when we vote tomorrow night we shall be taking an irrevocable step, which should not lead Parliament to be under any illusion that at a later date it can go back to remaining if it chooses, and if it does not like the deal.

The third and, I think, overwhelming point is this: in the end, what matters most is the fate of our country. All these arguments are just arguments, but the fate of our country is a real thing that affects the men and women living in it. The truth is that the negotiating hand that our Government have will largely determine whether, in the event, we secure a comprehensive free trade deal of the kind that the Prime Minister rightly seeks. I know of no fact more certain than that if the House were to suggest to our counterparties in the EU 27 that we might decide at a later date that, if the deal offered to us was bad enough, we would prefer to remain, they would offer us the worst deal they could think of. It would be an inevitable consequence of their wanting to keep us in—and, although I do not know exactly why, many of our EU 27 counterparties do want to keep us in—that they would best achieve that by offering the worst deal possible if they knew that Parliament might then vote to remain.

I therefore think that we in the House have a very solemn duty to make it abundantly clear—not just to the people in this country, but to the EU 27—that tomorrow night's vote will be an irrevocable act. We must make it clear that we are taking a step from which we cannot go back; that if those countries want a proper deal that is in the mutual interest, they should offer it; and that if we do not get that deal we will leave,

because we have triggered article 50 and we will be out, and we will have to cope with the consequences thereafter. That makes tomorrow night's vote one of the most important that we shall ever take in the House, and I take it with some doubt and hesitation, but I take it because I believe that, ultimately, the will of the people has been expressed.

4.8 pm

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): I find myself in the invidious position of agreeing with virtually everything that was said by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and with virtually everything that has been said by my hon. Friends who intend to vote against the Bill's Second Reading tomorrow evening. I differ from them in one respect only: I do not think it is possible for me, as a democratically elected Member of Parliament who entered into the referendum process having accepted that we were going to have a referendum, then to tell the public that somehow I know better, and that I am not going to honour the outcome of that referendum.

I will vote in favour of triggering article 50 for that reason, but also because I do not want the Conservatives, every time I challenge them over the process and every time I challenge them to come back to the House to be held accountable for what they are negotiating on behalf of this country, to turn around and say that I am seeking to second-guess the outcome of the referendum. They must be accountable to the House for what they are doing.

There are some questions to be asked about whether members of the Government are acting in our best interests. We had the spat with the Italian Economic Development Minister over whether Italy would be hurt by selling less prosecco to the UK, where he turned around and said, "We may sell a little less prosecco, but that'll be happening in one country, while you'll be selling less to 27 countries." We had the comments of the Foreign Secretary over freedom of movement as a founding principle of the European Union, where he used a very unfortunate word in an interview with a Czech newspaper and said it is a "total myth" and "nonsense" to say it is a "founding principle". He may well believe that that is true, but that is not the way to go about negotiating with people who are going to have an important say over future trade agreements for this country. Then, when it came to the meeting about the outcome of the American presidential election, he spoke down to the people attending a meeting specially convened to discuss that, and said:

"I would respectfully say to my beloved European friends and colleagues".

What sort of language is that to use—talking down to the very people we want to co-operate with us in future negotiations? He also went on to describe Donald Trump as

"a liberal guy from New York".

He may well be rethinking that one.

The Government have clearly shown that they are not to be trusted with these negotiations without having oversight from this House of Commons. We must have a say in this process. I will be voting to trigger article 50, and I have heard speeches from the Government Benches where Members have said that they also want to have a say over the process here in Parliament. I hope that we

will see them voting on amendments to ensure that that actually takes place in the three days of debates we will have next week.

I have heard all the talk about a brave new world that is going to open up for us under the World Trade Organisation, but people do not seem to be respecting the fact that there are rules, regulations and tariffs to be negotiated with the World Trade Organisation. In fact, it is highly likely that our easiest way into the World Trade Organisation is to take as a package all the agreements that we have under the EU and adopt them under the WTO; that is the easiest way possible to avoid all sorts of challenges to the UK.

Incidentally, we do not have the teams of lawyers, accountants and officials who are used to dealing with these sorts of negotiations to act on our behalf. We are opening up all these negotiations without having the expertise in place. The Government have repeatedly been asked questions about building up these Departments and the expertise: where are the experts who are used to negotiating on behalf of the UK? They are all in Europe; they have been doing it at a European level, and they are not here. We are going to have to do that at several levels—over article 50, over future trade agreements and over trade agreements through the WTO.

What is going to happen with those countries who have vested interests, like Spain, who might want to use this vulnerability of the UK to open up negotiations about Gibraltar? If we go into the World Trade Organisation, would Argentina start to challenge agreements with the UK to open up negotiations about the future of the Falklands Islands?

This is the reality of international trade agreements; this is the real world that we are going to be moving into. The idea that we can just fall out of Europe and fall into the World Trade Organisation with absolutely no consequences is folly. That is why this House of Commons has got to have a say over the process and scrutinise in detail what this Government are doing on behalf of this country. We as Members of Parliament have a duty to do that, and the Government should not stand in the way of democratic accountability in this House under the guise of saying, “You’re trying to renegotiate the outcome of the referendum.” That is not true, but that does not mean they cannot avoid accountability. I hope the Government will accept an amendment on that basis so that we do bring sovereignty back here to this House of Commons.

4.14 pm

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): May I begin by saying how grateful I am, and I am sure many other Members are, to both the High Court and the Supreme Court for their rulings which ensure that this Bill comes in front of the House of Commons today? As has been pointed out by our judges, not least by Lord Justice Laws in the “metric martyrs” case, the original European Communities Act 1972 was a constitutional statute of such significance that it and its provisions can only be changed by legislation, and I am glad that the Government have brought forward this Bill. The 1972 Act is so significant because, uniquely, it allows laws made outside this House to have a direct effect on the law of this land. That means that laws that are framed, designed and shaped by individuals whom we have never elected and whom we cannot remove have a sovereign ability to dictate what is legal and illegal in this House.

I have listened with respect and interest to all those, including the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), who have stressed the importance of parliamentary scrutiny, but where were they in the period between 1972 and now, when literally thousands of laws were imposed on the people of this country not only without scrutiny but without debate, without votes and without the possibility of amendment or rejection? I have to say that those people are pretty late coming to the democratic party now.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Michael Gove**: No.

In talking about democracy, it is vital, as was pointed out in the brilliant speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), that we do not attempt to revisit the decision that the British people made last year. I thought it was instructive that the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), was so dismissive of the result and of the debate during the referendum campaign. A previous leader of the Liberal Democrat party said on referendum night:

“In. Out. When the British people have spoken you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you don’t. When democracy speaks we obey. All of us do... Any people who retreat into ‘we’re coming back for a second one’—they don’t believe in democracy.”

It is a tragedy that the party that is called Liberal Democrat is scarcely liberal and, now, anti-democratic.

It would be harmful for our democracy at a time when we are all concerned about the rise of raucous populism—[*Interruption.*] I note the response from Scottish National party Members, who are the prime traders in raucous populism and the politics of division. If we were now to reject the considered decision of 17.4 million of our fellow citizens, we would only feed the disaffection with the democratic process that has led to unfortunate results in other countries. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset was right when he said that we should respect the result and honour the mandate.

A number of people are now asking for White Papers, scrutiny and greater clarity, but we have already had the promise of a White Paper, and a 6,000-word speech from our Prime Minister. We have had clarity in all these issues. Those people will not take yes for an answer; they are seeking not clarity but obfuscation, delay and a dilution of the democratic mandate of the British people.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): A 6,000-word speech from my right hon. Friend would be a very short speech. I want to challenge him on the issue of the White Paper. He and many others who campaigned and voted to leave want to take back control. They want control to rest in this sovereign Parliament. Does he agree, therefore, that it is right that the terms on which the Government want to start the negotiations should be presented in a White Paper to this Parliament and not just in a speech at Lancaster House?

**Michael Gove**: The Prime Minister has already agreed that a White Paper will be published, and rightly so. The Secretary of State has said from the Dispatch Box

[Michael Gove]

that it will come as soon as possible. I have enormous respect for my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), and I shall return in a moment to an argument that she has made outside this place.

Many of those who have called for a White Paper or for clarification rarely outline what they think the right course of action is. It is very rare to hear a positive case being put forward. Instead, we repeatedly hear attempts to rewrite what happened in the referendum. The right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) tried to present the referendum debate as though it had somehow been inconclusive on questions such as our membership of the single market or the customs union, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, we could not have been clearer on behalf of the leave campaign that we were leaving the single market. It was also made perfectly clear that we could not have trade deals in the future without leaving the customs union.

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. Friend please assure us that he will be true to his claim, as a leader of the leave campaign, that £350 million a week will now be going into our NHS? Or does he agree with others who say that that figure was always false and that that was a lie?

**Michael Gove:** I have no idea whether the word “lie” is unparliamentary, but as someone who is not in the Government I cannot deliver such sums. What I can do, however, is consistently argue, as I have done, that when we take back control of the money that we currently give to the European Union we can invest that money in the NHS. In fact, it was the consistent claim of the leave campaign, as my right hon. Friend well knows, that we wished to give £100 million to the NHS—some of the money that we were going to take back control of—and also spend money on supporting science and ensuring that we could get rid of VAT on fuel, something which we cannot do while we are still a member of the European Union.

**Angela Smith:** The right hon. Gentleman may not be in the Government and therefore able to make the decision, but will he confirm whether he will be lobbying his Prime Minister hard for £350 million for the NHS?

**Michael Gove:** I have repeatedly argued that we should ensure that that money is spent on our NHS and on other vital public services when we leave the European Union. That goes to the heart of the fair challenge issued by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and by the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Opposition spokesman: how do we ensure that the views of the 52%, which were clear, unambiguous and to which this legislation gives effect, and the views of the 48% who did not vote to leave are respected? The 48% are represented at the highest levels of Government. We have a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who voted to remain in the European Union, so it is not as though those views are ignored or marginal.

My challenge and my offer is that we ensure that the Brexit we embrace is liberal, open and democratic. For my part, that means more money to the NHS, but it

also means embracing the principles outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough in a recent “ConservativeHome” article. It means, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said, giving an absolute unilateral guarantee to EU citizens that they should stay here. It also means having a free trade policy liberated from the common external tariff, allowing us to lower trade barriers to developing nations and to help the third world to advance. It means exercising a leadership role on the world stage at a time when European Union politicians are increasingly naive or appeasing in their attitude towards Vladimir Putin. It means that we can stand tall, as the Prime Minister did, in making the case for collective western security and NATO. Those opportunities are all available to us as we leave the European Union. The challenge for the Opposition and the opportunity for us is to ensure that we make that positive case.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): Within the London Borough of Wandsworth, which contains my constituency, small businesses have been booming, and the previous Prime Minister and a member of the Government’s Treasury team—[*Interruption.*] Basically, last year, the Prime Minister said that businesses were booming due to access to the single market. Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that?

**Michael Gove:** I absolutely do. Since we have left the European Union, it has been remarkable to see—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds), may I appeal to Members to have some regard for the conventions of this place? I realise that the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), although incredibly bright, is very new to the House, but if one intervenes on a Member, one must do so with some regard to their moral entitlement to have time to reply, which the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) did not.

**Dr Allin-Khan:** Duly noted.

4.23 pm

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I certainly remember the Vote Leave campaign bus that promised £350 million a week for the NHS, which we unfortunately saw on our TV screens night in, night out, but I digress in following the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove).

I campaigned to remain in the EU, but I accept the result of the referendum and will vote for this Bill tomorrow. The leader of the Liberal Democrats calls that cowardly; I call it democracy. We held a national referendum. Those of us on the remain side might not like the result, but we have to accept it. It was close, but it was clear—and it was clear in my constituency. However, that does not mean that the Government get a free pass, and it does not mean that if I strive to hold them to account, I am an enemy of the people. After all, the Government are accountable to this place and have already made some major errors not just on the substance of these negotiations, but on the tone. For example, it is the height of irresponsibility for the Foreign Secretary to choose to pick needless fights with our EU counterparts

when we are about to embark on one of the most complicated and sensitive negotiations in our history. His focus, like ours, should be on securing the best deal for the UK and the rest of the EU.

For me, today's debate is not about whether we leave the EU, but about how this House holds the Government to account at every stage of the process and makes sure that they secure the best deal for the UK. After all, a bad deal or no deal could have catastrophic results for our economy, for jobs, for investment and for the living standards of the people we represent.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Lady mentioned the vote. To paraphrase the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the people of my country—the people of my nation—voted to remain, and I will be voting accordingly.

**Emma Reynolds:** The referendum in Scotland a couple of years ago was lost by the SNP. We are one country, and this was a national referendum.

I wish to make three brief points. First, we must have meaningful parliamentary scrutiny of the process. We are debating the Bill only because the Supreme Court upheld parliamentary sovereignty, which Eurosceptics have lectured us about throughout the decades but seem to think that we can give up on this issue. Giving MPs the opportunity to vote on and scrutinise the Government's plans at the very start and the very end of the process is not good enough. We are not here simply to rubber-stamp the Government's plans and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) so eloquently put it, we are not passive bystanders. We should be active participants in this process. After all, our Parliament represents every corner of our country and this Government do not.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who used to be a great champion of parliamentary sovereignty back in the day, said in this House on 24 January:

“The simple truth is that there will be any number of votes—too many to count—in the next two years across a whole range of issues.”—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 168.]

On that day I asked him whether Members of this House would get a vote either before or at the same time as the European Parliament. He claimed that he had not thought about that, which was rather odd, and kindly agreed to write to me. I am still waiting for his letter.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) forcefully made the point that we cannot just have a vote at the end of this process, when we could be left with a choice of no deal or leaving. In his winding-up speech tomorrow, I would like the Minister to tell us whether this House will have a vote prior to the European Parliament's vote on that stage of the negotiation. I hope that one of the amendments on that point will be agreed to.

Secondly, the Government must deliver the best economic deal and be clear about what it means. They must level with the British people about the risks to our economy. I understand that they have ruled out membership of the European single market. The Prime Minister says that her priority is tariff-free trade, but the benefits of the single market go way beyond a traditional free trade agreement. The single market is a vast factory floor

with integrated supply chains, and goods and services move seamlessly across borders. As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, regulatory barriers matter more than tariffs in the modern world, especially in advanced economies like our own. That is why businesses and business organisations are calling for regulatory stability, and I would like to hear more from the Government about that.

One of the most alarming prospects raised by the Prime Minister in her Lancaster House speech was that she was prepared to settle for no deal. What is a worse deal than no deal? I am struggling to understand why we would want to choose to fall back on WTO rules and tariffs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) said so eloquently, that would be catastrophic and would involve huge risks to jobs, investment and our constituents' prosperity.

Thirdly, and finally, I agree with hon. Members who have said that the Government should unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU nationals, as that would create good will in the negotiations and ensure that our nationals in other EU member states get the same treatment, but I also believe the Government should put forward a preferential and managed migration system within these negotiations. The Government are wrong to assume that free trade deals are just about trade. When the Prime Minister went to India, what did the Indian Government want to talk about? They wanted to talk about visas for their business people and for their students. To secure the best possible economic deal, the Government must put forward proposals that give EU workers preference, but we should also have a system that controls the numbers. That is why I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), have proposed a two-tier system that would retain free movement for highly skilled workers, but put in place controls for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers. I hope that the Government will start to give Parliament a meaningful say on this process.

4.30 pm

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): I suspect and fear that the process we are about to vote on will, in effect, close a lengthy chapter in our national history that has included our support of enlargement, and that has seen sustained growth in our economy, our country becoming more liberal and our being more active in the international field. That is a great problem to have to deal with, and historians will ask in years to come: why did we do this? We have to make sure that we understand the gravity of the situation and the seriousness of our decision. I campaigned very hard to stay in the EU, both in my own constituency, where I got 55% to say yes, and across the country. However, I did say that this was the decision and it was the decision that mattered, so I feel duty bound to recognise that I have to support article 50 this week, although I do so with a very, very heavy heart.

I want to say something about trade. There seems to be this idea that because we are in the EU we cannot trade elsewhere, but that is wrong. Germany, France, Italy, Poland and Spain all export to the rest of the world precisely because they are in the EU and because we have free trade agreements with the rest of the world. Let us be clear that all such agreements will have to be remade by us.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** If, as my hon. Friend supposes, the EU has been so successful at putting in place trade deals, how is that Switzerland has been able to set up many more trade deals than the EU has managed over the years?

**Neil Carmichael:** It is worth bearing in mind that the EU accounts for almost a quarter of the world's GDP and is involved in a huge amount of trade. That is a signal of why it is important for us to bear in mind what the EU has done for us.

I now want to talk about the 48% of people who voted to remain, because it is crucial that they are properly represented in this process. When we elect a Government in a general election, we do not expect them to govern just for one bit of the country; we expect them to govern for the whole country, with regard to every aspect of our national life. I do the same in my constituency. I do not ask whether someone voted for me before I start dealing with them; I say, "You are one of my constituents, whoever you voted for." That is how we have to deal with this business about Brexit. We must recognise that the 48% have a say and should be included, because that is how we are going to bring this together. We need to open things up and make sure that we reach out to them. Those of us who were in the 48% need to reach out to the others. When we are looking at the great repeal Bill—we should recall what happened to the Conservative party when we looked at the Great Reform Act—we will discover one or two important things about our national life, as we find that we are not always being told by the EU to do things that we do not want to do. I am look forward to the opportunity of exposing the facts during that debate, because Brexiteers will be disappointed to discover that quite a lot of things that we supposedly want to repeal are actually things that we might want to retain.

**Mr MacNeil:** On the point about being told what to do, was the hon. Gentleman astonished by the speech made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who is no longer in the Chamber? He said that the feeling in Northern Ireland was that the EU was telling people there what to do, and that that was a terrible thing, but that the fact that Northern Ireland is being told by the UK to leave the EU is seemingly okay. The idea of who is telling whom to do what seems to a shape-shifting one.

**Neil Carmichael:** I usually find that when I am telling somebody to do something they do not want to do, I get the blame, and if I suggest something that they do want to do, it was their idea in the first place. That is how we should remember this. When we look back on our history, we will see that that was absolutely right with regard to the European Union.

I wish to talk about events. Harold Macmillan was a great one for events, and we face two years of important events, some of which will be unpleasant and some quite surprising. I cannot predict what they will be, but the Government do have to react carefully to them, because they will involve changes in the economic mood and international policy situations that require a response above and beyond what we are focusing on with Brexit. We must remember that events will provide opportunities for a more sensible view about how we direct our Brexit negotiations and sense of purpose. Parliament must

have a significant say in how we proceed because such events will affect this country, our judgment, the negotiations and the overall outcome. The place to discuss and properly debate these things is Parliament, not press releases. Parliament is the national place for such decisions.

The fact that we cannot leave Europe geographically is critical. We are only a few miles away from the European continent, so we will always need to have good relationships with it and the 27 member states. I urge the Government—and everyone—to make sure that over the next two years those relationships are built on and strengthened. We do not want to find ourselves in a situation in which we do not have these friendships and alliances. Why? Because Europe itself will change, and we want to be part of that, driving it forward to even greater and better things. If we play our cards right, that will offer us the opportunity to think about, for example—I am just speculating—associate membership. We must not turn our back on the opportunities that might present themselves, which is why I am so keen that Parliament has a strong role and that, over the next two years, we think about possible events and opportunities, and retain and strengthen our relationships in Europe.

It is, of course, essential that Parliament has a final say when we get to the endgame, if we actually do. It is not only necessary to talk about voting on whether we have a deal or no deal; it is important that we have a view about where we go if a satisfactory deal does not emerge, or if no deal emerges at all. We must have a contribution to make. It is not correct to say that the European Union is hellbent on making our life a misery. Everybody knows that we are interdependent—we know that and it knows that, and it is important for us to accept that as a Parliament and as a country.

I am going to borrow a very good phrase from one of my constituents: "You shouldn't jump out of an aeroplane without checking that the parachute is working." That is what we will have to consider as we head towards the final moments in two years. We must think about how we incorporate in our decision the views of not only the 52%, but the 48%. We must think about the opportunities that may arise from events, as well as threats that might emerge, and we must maintain good relationships. Above all, we must recognise that this Parliament is sovereign; it always has been, and that is what we have to salute.

4.39 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow a thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael).

A Government who were confident in what they were doing and confident that they were pursuing the right ends would have had no difficulty in engaging with Parliament. In fact, they would have welcomed the opportunity. What we saw instead was a Government and a Prime Minister hiding from Parliament and the democratic processes on which good governance is built. They were forced into coming to the House and doing the right thing only because they were dragged before the courts, defeated, and defeated again by campaigners holding up the principle of parliamentary democracy as something to which the Government should bow. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to thank those democracy campaigners—I single out Gina Miller in particular—for their contribution, which, as I have mentioned before, will have long-lasting effects on this and other issues.

This Bill—these few paragraphs, this poor excuse for legislation—has been wrung out of the Government, and its brevity is childish and disrespectful to this place, the courts and the people whose representatives come here on their behalf. The Government should be ashamed of themselves. The suggestion is that no preparation was done by the Government in advance of the Court judgment—not even when the judgment was going back to appeal without much hope of success. That would smack of the same kind of arrogant laziness that marked the approach of David Cameron’s Government to the referendum. There was no preparation; they just winged it and hoped. After hearing Members from the Government Benches, I am shocked that they do not think that the people should be entitled to know what the plan is. People like to mention the independence referendum very often: in Scotland, we debated the details for two years. In this place, the Government still do not what the details are two months before kick-off.

A clear indication of the lack of preparation is the attitude that the Government have struck towards the devolved Administrations, promising consultation and open dialogue, but delivering little—almost nothing. The Scottish Government, who have put some thought into how to proceed, offered some constructive suggestions but had nothing in return other than a promise that the paper that they presented would be read. There was no real engagement, no dialogue, no offer to discuss the negotiations as they go along, and no offer of a seat at the negotiating table for Scottish Ministers. That is what a United Kingdom Government would offer if they were serious about taking the devolved Administrations with them and if they were confident of their ground.

Scotland and Wales have particular reasons to be anxious about what the UK Government are doing in Europe, but Northern Ireland, despite the warm words of the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), has more reason than most to worry. The prospect of a return to a hard border is horrendous for communities and businesses in Northern Ireland and any threat to the common travel area extremely serious. The Government’s attitude to date seems to be an approach that says that everything will be fine, that Northern Ireland has always been treated as a special case by the EU and will be treated so again. That ignores the fact that it was treated as a special case while it was part of the EU. There are no guarantees that any EU institution or member state will feel like giving special dispensation to Northern Ireland. If there is a case to be made there, it may only be by the grace and good will of the Irish Government that it is made.

The UK is approaching Brexit in the same way that this Bill was made—with hope, arrogance, swagger, disdain and, frankly, nothing in its pockets. There is nothing on offer to our European partners because the arrogant assumption of this Government and of the Brexiteers around them is that the EU needs the UK more than the UK needs the EU, and that London is the epicentre of world trade, which means that the EU’s financial institutions will come begging rather than that firms will move staff to the EU.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for giving way. She is absolutely right to raise the matter of the Irish border. If I were living in the Irish Republic, I would be greatly concerned that my single largest trading partner—the USA—is not in the EU

and, pretty soon, my other single largest trading partner—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—will not be in the EU either. The Republic should be getting out along with us.

**Deidre Brock:** Maintaining a close trading relationship with Northern Ireland will of course be in the best interests of the UK, whether or not it is in Europe, and it is the same with Europe as well.

Let me return to my point about the Government believing that the EU’s financial institutions will come begging rather than that firms will move staff to the EU. That is how it appears and how it will continue to appear, because this legislation, perhaps the most important constitutional legislation considered by this House in 40 years, has come without a White Paper or an intelligible Government position. It has come without a manifesto commitment and without preparation. This Bill cannot be entrusted to carry the intent of this House, because this House does not know the intent of the Government in leading negotiations with the 27 other EU states. What does the trading agreement they seek look like? Does it give us full access to the market? What about the movement of people between EU countries and the UK? We hear a constant barrage of comments about taking back control of immigration, but nothing about how those controls will be exercised. We know neither the starting position nor the hoped-for end effects of the triggering of article 50. We saw a supposed 12-point plan recently, but frankly that looked more like a wish list. In the great field of evidence-based policy making, this Bill does not figure. The devolved Administrations on these islands have been operating without knowing what position the UK Government are taking, each trying to find some kind of satisfactory rescue for their people, but all hampered by the UK Government.

I should be astonished that the Government are seeking to take the UK out of the EU with this pitiful “dog ate my homework” excuse for a Bill and I should be shocked that most of the loyal Opposition are not opposing it, but I am not. We have come to expect nothing more from this clueless, rudderless Government and this apparently fratricidal official Opposition. The SNP will not support the triggering of article 50. We believe that Scotland’s place is in the EU and we are here to speak up for Scotland’s best interests. I hope that enough Members on the Government and Labour Benches have the character to join us in the Lobby, but I am not holding my breath.

4.45 pm

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): This is an historic day. I participated in the campaign and fought hard for us to leave the European Union. I was too young to vote in the first referendum in 1975—*[Interruption.]* My birth certificate will be available for viewing later. I was too young, so this, 43 years later, was the first referendum on Europe in which I had an opportunity to vote. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) said that when someone is jumping out of an aeroplane, they should make sure that the parachute is working; I prefer the adage “if at first you don’t succeed, skydiving isn’t for you”.

On this occasion, the British people knew exactly what they were doing. It was a hard fought campaign. We heard all the arguments for remaining, which were

[Mr Nigel Evans]

characterised as “Project Fear”. I am really pleased that the vast majority of what was predicted has simply not happened.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman says that the British people knew exactly what they were doing. I have great respect for him, as he knows, but the International Trade Committee, on which he and I sit, has had sitting after sitting trying to work out what it is all going to mean. I am amazed that everybody knew everything before, given all those sittings. I find those two ideas rather incongruous.

**Mr Evans:** It was said that a number of things would happen when we left the European Union. I suspect that the reality is that many were somewhat surprised that the British people had the guts: despite what they were told was going to happen, they still decided to vote to leave the European Union. I remember the then Prime Minister appearing on television and saying that if we voted to leave, we would also be leaving the single market—he actually said that on the “Marr” programme just a couple of weeks prior to the referendum on 23 June. As Prime Minister, he said that, so we needed to take heed. People knew that. He said it to frighten people into not voting to leave the European Union.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP) *rose—*

**Mr Evans:** I will make a bit more progress if I may.

Despite all those threats, the British people decided that, in their considered opinion, they wanted to vote to leave the European Union. About 57% of my constituents voted to leave—all the Lancashire constituencies, in fact, voted to leave the European Union. In the north-west of England, on a 70% turnout—not a thin turnout—54% decided to vote to leave. That reminds me of the referendum on Welsh devolution. The turnout was 50.1%, 49.7% of whom said no and 50.3% of whom said yes. And what did we do? We did not shout for a second referendum. We did not even call for a recount. Is it too late? The fact is that we accepted the result on a thin turnout and a very close result indeed, and that is what is expected of us on this occasion.

I condemn the pamphlet that was sent to every household in the country at the cost of £9.3 million. I was one of the people who did not send it back to No. 10 Downing Street without a stamp; I kept it as a souvenir. The back of it read:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

Therefore, if we believe in democracy, the onus is on us to accept the verdict of the British people—52% versus 48%—and give the Prime Minister the power to trigger article 50.

I fully recognise the trauma felt by many European Union citizens who live and work in this country, thinking they could be asked to leave. The idea that we will round up EU nationals and put them on the next Ryanair or easyJet flight back to whichever country they came from is bonkers. That would be quite despicable, and we ought to clarify as quickly as possible that we will not ask that of them.

**Dr Allin-Khan:** EU citizens are a vital part of our community. They work in our communities. Many of us are married to them, and they are our friends, families and colleagues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should give these people, who have contributed so much, legal certainty, as soon as possible?

**Mr Evans:** I totally agree with the hon. Lady. I also have cognisance of the British people who happen to live in the south of Spain, or who work and live in Madrid, Frankfurt and various other parts of the European Union. They are going through the same trauma that EU citizens are going through here.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Evans:** I will not because I do not have time.

As I understand it, the Prime Minister has already made it clear that as soon as the rest of the EU says yes—whether President Juncker or someone else makes the decision—regarding British citizens in the EU, that is exactly what will happen for EU citizens living here. It is cruel and inhumane for the Commission to say that it will not clarify its position until we trigger article 50 and the negotiations begin, as if human beings should be pawns in the negotiation. If that position is kept up, I ask the Government to ensure that this matter is the first thing negotiated in the process. As soon as the agreement comes, we should announce it straight away and we should let people know our exact intention, not wait until the two-year process is finished. That is the humane thing to do. The prospect of Germany, which has taken in 1 million refugees from the middle east, rounding up British citizens and sending them home is a remarkable thought and it would be a remarkable sight. The situation must be clarified as quickly as possible.

In conclusion, I believe in democracy and I actually love Europe. I love my European neighbours and I visit on a regular basis. I am a member of the Council of Europe. Indeed, I was at one of its part-sessions in Strasbourg last week. But the British people have voted to leave the European Union. It is a simple choice. Those who are going to deny the verdict of the British people appear to love the EU more than they love democracy, and that is a dangerous thing.

4.54 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I quite enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) until the last bit.

Today we debate not just this shortest of short Bills but our intention to set in train enormous constitutional, legal, political, social and economic changes for our country. Yet this was a debate the Government did not want us to have. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the highest court in the land and ordered to give this sovereign Parliament a say, taken there by a brave woman who is now receiving death threats for her trouble. The Government tried to claim that taking back control meant the revival of government by diktat using the royal prerogative—an abuse that the civil war was fought to eliminate.

Literally everything we have legislated for in the past 40 years through the EU is now up for grabs: rights at work, health and safety, environmental standards, regulation, consumer rights, food standards, and trading rules.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): With regard to this list of all the rights that we are going to lose, allegedly, or that those who wish to remain in the EU think we are going to lose, why can we not make all these decisions in this place, for our country, for the benefit of our people? We do not need other people to make our rules.

**Ms Eagle:** When we joined the European Union we pooled parts of our sovereignty so that we could have a bigger bang for the buck that we spent, particularly on issues such as the environment. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has noticed, but pollution does not stop at national borders.

The most hallucinatory of the Eurosceptic nostalgics in the Tory party dream of a frictionless divorce with no real consequences, economic or otherwise—a trade deal swiftly done which grants the UK all the benefits of EU membership with none of the costs. Some of them even imagine a new mercantilist British empire, forgetting that times have almost certainly moved on. They are content to gamble with 50% of our trade and 100% of our prosperity.

I argued passionately against the isolationist leave side in the referendum, and fought back against the alternative facts and magical thinking that underlay many of the arguments put forward by the other side. I especially disapproved of the downright lies on the NHS cynically perpetrated by the leading lights of the leave campaign and repudiated by them on the day after their victory. Who will ever forget that bus, now a byword for cynical manipulation? As it happens, the Wirral voted narrowly in favour of remaining—a tribute to its good judgment, along with its record of returning a full deck of Labour MPs at the last general election.

But we are where we are, and it is undoubtedly the case that the country as a whole voted 52:48 to leave. The referendum split the country down the middle. A Government interested in building a decent future for our country would have sought to bring us together, but this Government have done the opposite. They have chosen to interpret the results of the referendum as a victory for Nigel Farage's very own version of "Little Britain". First there were the xenophobic speeches at Tory conference announcing the creation of lists of foreign workers, then the months of confusion about the nature of the Government's plan, then the Prime Minister's speech, and finally a promised, but as yet unpublished, White Paper.

If she does not get her way in Europe, the Prime Minister has threatened to create a low-regulation Britain with fewer human, civil and workers' rights guaranteed in law, unmaking decades of social progress. That is unacceptable to Labour Members and I believe it is unacceptable to the British public. The narrow majority of British voters who cast their ballots for Britain to leave the EU did not, to a person, have in their mind's eye a libertarian fantasy state as their end goal. They were told they could expect, and they voted for, more money for crucial services, and sensible controls on immigration. In reality, they continue to get massive cuts to the NHS, policing, local services and schools, as this Government's austerity cuts continue to decimate our public services and care for the elderly.

I fully endorse the amendments tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—they would make the best of this difficult situation—but

I know that Opposition amendments, no matter how sensible, rarely get accepted by the Government, especially this Government, who seem obsessed with bringing about the most extreme Brexit possible. Labour will fight to get the best possible Brexit deal.

I surveyed members in Wallasey this past weekend, and I received responses from a substantial number of them. To the hundreds who responded I say thank you for shaping my approach to this most difficult of votes. A huge majority thought that the Bill would make them and their families worse off. Just over half thought that we should engage but beware of the Government's motives, and that we should give the Government authorisation to proceed only once we had guarantees on workers' rights and tariff-free access to the single market.

As democratic politicians, we have to recognise the result of the referendum, but that does not give the Government carte blanche for an extreme Brexit. It does not give the Government permission to destroy the social settlement and make our society poorer and even more precarious. Labour's amendments guaranteeing rights at work, equality rights and the environmental standards that we take for granted now are crucial if the Bill is to be acceptable and to help to bring our divided country together.

Rather than presenting the House with the most perfunctory Bill possible, I wish the Government had wanted to engage and involve Parliament in what will be the most crucial project we have undertaken in generations. I wish we had a Government who wanted to grant meaningful votes and real influence to Parliament rather than simply trying to reduce parliamentary sovereignty to a take-it-or-leave-it rubber stamp.

We swap the known for the unknown in one of the most volatile political eras that I have experienced in my lifetime. We throw away established relationships and economic connections, including deeply integrated European supply chains and cultural affinities. We alienate our closest allies in perilous times. We have a divided and angry country. Social injustice and poverty are soaring, and many regions are being neglected. I am in politics to defend them, and defend them I will.

5.1 pm

**George Freeman** (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Last year, as Minister for Life Sciences, I voted for the EU referendum on the basis that I would be bound by the result. Despite watching over many years with a heaviness of heart the growing failure of the EU to create an entrepreneurial economy, on balance I felt that we were better off staying in to fight for a reformed, 21st-century EU. As Life Sciences Minister responsible for a £250 billion sector, I felt that I had to speak for its interests. So I campaigned, along with many colleagues, for remain, not in a bullying way but in an open way.

I actively offered my constituents a choice by inviting my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and my friend the hon. Member for Clacton (Mr Carswell) to my constituency to put their side of the debate. We held the debate, and I lost it. Our constituents voted to leave the European Union. My constituents voted, and the country voted, in one of the biggest acts of democracy we have seen for centuries.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said, we are not delegates. As Edmund Burke said, we are not sent here to be slaves to our constituents. I believe that the one thing that parliamentarians

[George Freeman]

should never give away is the sovereignty vested in us by the people we serve. The truth is that successive Parliaments in recent decades have done that, not least in the Maastricht and the Lisbon treaties, fuelling public anger and disillusionment and the sense of unaccountable political elites giving away powers that were never theirs in the first place. That is why I believe we were right to give the people their say and we are right—all of us—to recognise the importance of that vote and the anger that was expressed.

**Mr Baker:** Since my hon. Friend mentions our debate, I hope that he will not mind my saying that he fought the fight with great nobility and grace, and he was eloquent at all times. If only both sides of the campaign—I do mean both sides—had conducted themselves as he did, the referendum campaign would have been far happier.

**George Freeman:** I thank my hon. Friend for that gracious intervention. Having won sovereignty back for this House, we must use it. We must show that the House is worthy of that sovereignty and capable of acting in the interests of all the people we serve. Churchill said once:

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”

In the referendum campaign, we all stood up and spoke passionately for our respective sides, but now is the time for us to do the other courageous thing and listen to the will of the British people.

We have to make Brexit work for the 48% as well as the 52%, for London as well as the north, for white-collar as well as blue-collar workers and for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. We need to deliver not a soft or a hard Brexit but a British Brexit, which allows us to respect our European neighbours, to be a good neighbour and, as the Prime Minister made clear in her recent speech, to be an active European ally and collaborator—outside the political institutions of the EU, but members of a European community of nations and neighbours.

In my view, proper democrats cannot and must not say, “Oh, the Brexit vote was illegitimate. Brexit voters were ignorant. They weren’t qualified.” How condescending! Do we say that when they vote Labour, or when they vote UKIP? No. We all of us accept such results, and so we should now. Although the referendum was, in my opinion, a low point in British political discourse—let us remember that it included the appalling murder of one of our colleagues by a deranged neo-Nazi—the core underlying mandate of the British people was crystal clear. To the extent that it was not crystal clear, it is our job as elected democrats in our debates in this House to bring to the vote the crystal clarity that it needs.

All we are now doing is giving the Prime Minister and her Government the authority to start the negotiation of the terms on which we will leave the European Union. In many ways, the real debate will come not this afternoon, but when we discuss the terms of the negotiation in the House during the next two years and, ultimately, the package that she brings back to us.

**Alex Salmond:** Scotland is an equal partner in this “United Kingdom of nations”, to quote the former Prime Minister, so how does it come about that a massive

vote in Scotland to remain and a narrow vote in England to leave results in Scotland leaving on England’s terms?

**George Freeman:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point. One of the most interesting aspects of the Supreme Court judgment—the media have not picked it up—is that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales were and are bound by the vote of this sovereign House, which SNP Members participated in, to give the British people such a decision.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**George Freeman:** The truth is that the real challenge now falls to our new Prime Minister, who stepped in—

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I must protect the hon. Gentleman.

**George Freeman:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Our Prime Minister stepped in to lead a Government committed to delivering Brexit, but who would tackle the domestic policy challenges that fuelled much of the wider disillusionment that the vote also signified. It is my privilege to work with her team on that. She now faces an extraordinary political challenge: to deliver Brexit, to negotiate the most important deal for this country in 100 years; to negotiate new trade deals with countries around the world; and to continue the great and urgent task of domestic social and economic reform, such as tackling our structural deficit, shaping our old-fashioned public services and tackling the urgent challenges of social and economic exclusion.

The truth is that the Brexit negotiations ahead of us are perhaps the greatest test of British peacetime diplomacy for a century, and the burden that falls on our Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union is heavy indeed. To succeed, we will have to put aside many of the differences that divide this House, and instead work together to make sure that we get the best deal for the country we all serve. Our interests are not served by requesting that the negotiation be carried out on Twitter.

At a time when trust in politics has never been so low, we have an opportunity to restore public trust in mainstream politics not to score easy points, but to show that we are worthy of the sovereignty vested in us and in the name of which the Brexiteers have campaigned. Our Brexit deal must be an ambitious Brexit deal for Britain. It must be a Brexit that means we can once again control our own laws, strengthen our Union, protect workers’ rights and strike ambitious new trade deals around the world. [Interruption.] Yes, for Scotland, too. To do this, however, we will have to continue to be engaged with the world, and to cherish our British values. [Interruption.] As the Prime Minister made clear in her recent electrifying speech—I encourage the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who is chuntering from a sedentary position, to read it—the work of bridging the gap between Europe and the United States will remain one of the key tasks of international relations for many decades to come.

I believe our Prime Minister has set out to do for markets and the west what the great Lady Thatcher did for the defence of the west. Last week, she showed that she was more than up for leading such a mission. It may not always be easy, but it is necessary for this country, which is not something that the right hon. Gentleman who was chuntering understands. I welcome the fact that she has made such an encouraging start with President Trump—he, too, has been elected—because although he campaigned for “America first”, the foreign policy signals are that for the Americans it is now a case of “Britain first”, and we should welcome that.

**Alex Salmond:** When the Prime Minister this week refused three times to condemn an obvious breach of not just this country’s values but any liberal democracy’s values, what part of great British values was she standing up for?

**George Freeman:** I think the people of this country, in the way they have rewarded our Prime Minister with a huge lead in the opinion polls, know exactly the answer to that question.

We need a Brexit that works for the UK, the EU and the USA, because the west is facing a major test. It is in all our interests to make it work. This is not just a cultural debate; it is a hard-headed economic negotiation. The truth is that our diplomatic, military and political authority in the west is based on our economic growth and economic success. That is why I am passionately excited about the future for this country as a source of science for global sustainable growth in food, medicine and energy: Britain as a crucible of a deregulated, innovation economy leading the world in the challenges of the 21st century.

5.10 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Other speeches have been eloquent, passionate and constitutionally well informed. This speech will not be that. I want this speech to be about, and to be addressed directly to, my constituents.

The residents of Trafford voted to remain in the European Union, reflecting, I believe, our long and proud industrial history of trade, export and innovation. Trafford Park, in my constituency, was the first—I think it remains the largest—industrial estate in Europe. It is home to many domestic, European and international businesses, some of which have been based there for many decades. We welcome, too, EU and international businesses and manufacturers who have established sizeable operations elsewhere in the constituency. They make a significant contribution, nationally and locally, to the economy and employment. They are successful, they are thriving and many have been very clear with me that leaving the EU will make doing business more complex, uncertain and difficult. They highlight the importance of access to the EU market and skilled EU workers, consistent regulatory standards, and avoiding tariff barriers.

They are also adaptable. I do not say that on leaving the European Union their businesses will fail or be unable to adapt to new circumstances. However, what they look for, as far as possible, is continuity and certainty. What they say to me is that neither of those appears likely as a result of the Bill. What we know is not what we will have, but what we will not have. Single

market access is out and so is full membership of the customs union. In their place come vague aspirations of new deals and arrangements with the EU and other countries that completely fail to recognise that our aspirations may not match those of our partners. On 17 January, when the Secretary of State came to this House to make a statement on the Prime Minister’s speech, I asked what he thought would happen in the gap between current trading arrangements ending and new ones being negotiated. He suggested there would be no such gap. I think that is fanciful. It is a head-in-the-sand attitude to negotiations. We have to recognise that leaving the EU will create gaps and shocks in our economy.

Shocks can of course be managed, but not by outright denial of their existence. With the Bill, we are being asked to buy a pig in a poke. We are being asked to vote to trigger the exit process with no evidence at all that there is a plan in place to protect our economy and our constituents. Important protections and standards all remain to be secured, whether in relation to our economy, our trading relationships or our security. To be asked now to endorse an exit process, when the answers to those important questions are still so vague, does not bode well for the outcome. In fact, the position with the Bill is so uncertain that I find it impossible to vote for it. I will abstain on the vote tomorrow. If the Government cannot allay my concerns during the remainder of the Bill’s passage through Parliament such that I can be sure that my constituents’ interests will be protected, at the final vote I will oppose it.

In saying that, and in concluding, I want to address the argument about respecting the referendum result. I have thought deeply about this, as I have sought to balance the wishes of voters in Trafford with the national result in a referendum for which I freely acknowledge I voted. Some of my constituents who voted to remain have told me they now feel we have no choice but to accept the result, but others do not think that. I have been sent here by my constituents to represent their interests as I see best, and I am falling back on my conscience.

Everything I have done in politics and public policy has been informed by what I believe to be the most important priority: namely, what is the interest not just of my constituents but of future generations, and I do not believe that future generations will be well served by woolly aspirations to address the economic, social and security needs of their futures, by our turning our backs on maximum access to the single market, by the absence of detail on rights, protections and security or by Ministers’ complacent optimism or lazy promises.

The Government could make good these deficiencies, were they to accept many of the amendments to the Bill, but unless that happens we should not proceed to trigger article 50. In my view, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) was right to say that the judgment of future generations is what must guide us in making a decision on the Bill. We will be judged by them on the deal they inherit.

5.16 pm

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this historic debate. We have heard many passionate contributions, including from the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who has clearly thought about this issue a lot and clearly takes a

[Tom Pursglove]

principled position. I do not share it, but I do respect it. Many of the contributions mirror the exact debate we had out in the country last June, when people put their arguments passionately on both sides of the debate. It was a privilege to go up and down the country, engaging with and talking to people on both sides—about their concerns and reasons for voting to leave the EU and about the argument for voting to remain. I recognise, therefore, that there are sincerely held points of view, not just in the House but across the country.

The word “judgment” has been used a lot this afternoon, and there have been many references to Burke in 1774, but my judgment is plain for all to see. I used my judgment in standing on the manifesto I stood on in 2015, I used my judgment in voting for the referendum and I used my judgment in advocating that my constituents and people across this great country vote to leave.

**Stephen Gethins:** Did you use your judgment when it came to standing on a blank piece of paper and putting that to the people in terms of the leave vote?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Would the hon. Gentleman mind asking the hon. Gentleman, rather than the Chair, about the use of judgment? I know he does not care how I use my judgment.

**Stephen Gethins:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does the hon. Gentleman consider it a lack of judgment that he campaigned on a blank piece of paper in terms of voting leave?

**Tom Pursglove:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but it has probably detained the House long enough already. The leave side stood on a platform that was clear for all to see, but I have no intention of raking over that ground, as time is short.

As Members of Parliament we have responsibilities, and the order of these things is well established: we have to put the national interest first. In the interests of balance, I will talk about two things said so far. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is right that all those Members who voted for the referendum have a duty to deliver on the verdict. On the remain side, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) made a powerful point when he said that every Member had a duty to end the uncertainty. Let us be clear: the debate was had, the engagement was high and the turnout was the highest that we have seen for nearly 25 years. In my constituency of Corby and East Northamptonshire, the verdict was clear as well. In Corby, 64.25% voted to leave; in East Northamptonshire, the majority of which I represent, 58.75% voted to leave.

Members in all parts of the House have set this train in motion. We used our judgment, not just in voting for the referendum, but in choosing a side and making the arguments, but in doing that we also judged that we were going to let the people and the country decide, and that is exactly what they did. I believe that we have a duty to live up to our responsibilities, because we abdicate and tamper with our democratic principles at our peril.

5.20 pm

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** How did we get to this point, with a nation so divided? The weekend after 23 June, I held an advice surgery, because a lot of European nationals live in Hornsey and Wood Green. Five hundred people came to see me to express their distress, and that was not just European nationals but everybody, from across the community. That said so much about how many of our communities feel about this question.

I am delighted to have my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on the Bench next to me, because he has taken such a brave stance over the last eight months on this question. Anyone who reads his Twitter feed will see that he has received the most enormous abuse, which has been uncomfortable for those of us who care deeply about race relations, particularly in London and around.

I would also like to talk about the way in which we have come to this decision-making process. Many of us came into the House through local government. As a council leader, if I had tried to bring forward a decision in my council on the basis of a speech and a couple of letters to the local newspaper, my councillors would have hounded me out of the council room, and they would have been quite right. Indeed, the chair of my Labour group and secretary would have been hammering me, so I feel that we have not questioned enough, including internally, within the governing majority party. Despite our best efforts from the Front Benches of other parties, I feel that we have simply not had the numbers to hold the Government to account on crucial votes. That is a cause of great regret.

I want briefly to talk about the economy. We know that the statistics are not quite there yet, but household debt is up 13% in the last 12 months. We also know that our currency is dropping. The dropping of the currency is an external assessment of our economy, which is a cause for concern as well. We know that when the economy declines, it is not the well-off communities that are affected, but the poorer ones. Mr Farage famously said:

“I think the social side of this matters more than pure market economics,”

admitting that being poorer could be the result of leaving the European Union. Somehow, I suspect that poverty will not apply to Mr Farage, who does not look as though he is getting any poorer.

I want briefly to return to a point that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) made earlier in the debate about Mr Spinelli, who wrote about the rise of nationalism. I believe this is a cause for concern. One hundred years ago, my great-uncle died at Passchendaele. When I take my children to see his grave and try to explain why he died and what he died for, I talk about values such as liberty and trying to work with people whom we do not get on with, and I think back to the 42 years of peace and prosperity that we have had. We are in a really dangerous place internationally, and I worry about our realignment with the US, a country that is perhaps not as open to free trade right now as we would like it to be, or to different ideas or the different people who make up this incredible globe.

I want to express my fear and concern that leaving the European Union may also lead to a poorer future, not just for jobs and the economy, and not just because

sterling is going down, but because we are making this decision for young people. Many of us here voted twice on whether 16 to 18-year-olds should have had the right to participate in the referendum. Sadly, we were defeated twice, despite the advice from the other place. I think that is a terrible pity, because I feel that they think we are slamming the door on their future. I am also a strong Unionist, and I feel sad because I think this will have a detrimental effect on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are a great many questions there that have not been answered. We have not been given any information, and we have not been brought in on this wonderful secret negotiation that is happening. I do not feel ready to trust.

The best power that I can use is my vote. When tomorrow comes, I shall not vote to support Second Reading, because I think this is the only way to make the Government listen to the concerns that many of us hold, and hold very dearly. It is not just about jobs and the economy; it is about our children and our grandchildren, and about peace and prosperity.

5.25 pm

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who speaks with total sincerity. I obviously do not agree with her analysis of the economy, and I do not agree with voting against article 50, but I absolutely respect her sincerity in making the decision she has. One important aspect of today's debate is that it is about individual Members making up their mind.

Anyone who goes to a Conservative selection event will find that one question likely to be asked is, "What would you put first—country, constituency or party?" The answer is country first, constituency second and party third. Happily, in most cases that aligns; it certainly aligns now, and I am delighted with what the Government have done.

I think that the Government were wrong, but I understand why they tried to go via the royal prerogative. They took the view that this House had delegated to the British people the decision on whether we should stay or leave the European Union. Once that decision was made, they thought they could trigger article 50 through the royal prerogative. In fact, I remember the previous Prime Minister saying that he would trigger article 50 the day after the vote. I argued against that privately. I said that we should have a parliamentary process, and that it should be done through a Bill in Parliament. I introduced a private Member's Bill to do exactly that, and trigger article 50 by 31 March. The only reason it did not get a Second Reading was that the Labour deputy Chief Whip objected to it.

I am very pleased that the Labour party has now taken a very different line. I thought the shadow Secretary of State got it right: trigger article 50, because that is what the British people voted for, then let us have full parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill. No Bill going through this Parliament—the great repeal Act or anything else—will fail to benefit from the parliamentary process. It may well be that this Bill will benefit next week from the approval of some amendment or other. I do not know, but it will benefit from full parliamentary scrutiny.

I apologise for wearing the hideous tie again. It has come out of retirement for today and tomorrow and for three days next week. Obviously, however, if this House

were somehow to vote not to trigger article 50, I would have to wear the tie for a lot longer. Hopefully, that might change some votes on the other side.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green mentioned that it was very difficult to get on and work with some people. As a founding member of GO—Grassroots Out—which was a cross-party group that campaigned to leave, I know exactly what she means. I had to work with people from the Labour party, the Democratic Unionist party and the UK Independence party—and, what was even more difficult, with people from my own party—to try to get us all to agree to put party politics to one side. It was an amazing feat as we toured up and down the country to find that people who could not really stand each other—[*Interruption*]; yes, and that is just the Tory party—could actually work together and produce something in the national interest.

I look across the Chamber and see the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). What an outstanding parliamentarian! She put the country first. It was difficult enough, all those years ago, to be in the Conservative party when it was absolutely for the European Union and we were idiots to request a referendum. It must be much more difficult to be in the Labour party and campaign for us to leave, and I congratulate members of the Labour party who put their country first.

It may seem somewhat controversial in this Chamber, but I also congratulate Nigel Farage. I think that he campaigned for something in which he believed passionately. When I worked with him, he toed the GO line. Four people decided GO policy: the hon. Member for Vauxhall, myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), and Nigel Farage. Despite our different views, we all managed to work together in the country's interest.

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): I am actually rather enjoying my hon. Friend's speech, but will he say whether he and the other members of the GO campaign supported the shameful and outrageous "Breaking Point" poster?

**Mr Bone**: I am afraid that by the time we embarked on the referendum campaign proper, the GO movement alliance had broken down. I am sorry if I misled the House. I should have said that prior to the designation of the official campaign, the GO organisation was united, but after that its members went their separate ways. If we are touching on the issue of immigration, however, let me say that it was always GO's view that European Union citizens who were in this country before the referendum had the right to stay. I personally would have liked the Government to act on that unilaterally, although I completely understand why they have not done so: they want to protect our citizens abroad.

Whichever way we look at it, and whichever side of the argument we were on, this was an extraordinarily democratic exercise. The great thing now is that the focus of the country is back here in this sovereign Parliament, where we can make the decisions. Let me say this to Opposition Members. Some time in the future, you will be on these Benches, and you will be able to make the laws. You will be able to push it. Hopefully, that will not happen for a long time—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please say "they will be able to make the laws"? I will give him 10 seconds in which to say that.

**Mr Bone:** In fact, I am going to change my mind. They will never have a chance to make the laws.

5.32 pm

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I believe that the votes that I shall cast on the Bill will be the most important votes that I shall cast as a Member of Parliament.

I am a passionate European. I represent a European capital city constituency. I campaigned strongly for us to remain in the EU last year; I voted for us to remain, and my constituents and my city voted overwhelmingly for us to remain.

I have lived in Cardiff for nearly 30 years. The very first person whom I met when I unloaded my belongings from the transit van in 1989 was a French national who had come to Cardiff from Limoges. He lived next door, and he has become a lifelong friend, as well as a successful businessman in my city, employing many people. Now, 30 years on, I live next door to a German national, a university academic who has made his home in my constituency, has married a Welsh woman, and has a young family. He is an expert in his field, and is teaching the next generation of experts at one of my constituency's three universities.

Every day in Cardiff Central I meet and speak and listen to neighbours and residents from across Europe and across the globe: business owners, students, doctors, healthcare workers, researchers, teachers, mothers, fathers and children. During and since the referendum campaign, however, I have had many conversations with constituents who are worried and frightened. Some have been victims of racism and hate crimes, like my friend Suzanne, who came to Cardiff from Germany and has a young daughter Lilleth, who is at primary school. They have been spat at, told to "go home", and had bricks and stones thrown at them in the street. This is the climate that they, and we, are living in, and I do not believe it is a coincidence of timing. It is a direct consequence of the referendum campaign, and the events of the past week in the United States make me more fearful of the rapidly developing climate of intolerance in our country. I implore Ministers to reassure immediately EU nationals across Britain that their legal status will be confirmed.

When I look back at the last 12 months leading up to the publication of this Bill, one thing stands out for me: the reckless action of the former Member for Witney. Where is he now? He has gone, disappeared, vanished; a man who put himself and his party before the national interest, and who gambled our country's safety, future prosperity and long-standing European and wider international relationships to save his party and his premiership from imploding. He went to Brussels and miserably failed to negotiate a suitable reform package. He denied 16 and 17-year-olds the right to have a vote in their future. Then he abandoned ship, leaving an almighty mess behind him.

I accept that the referendum result is to leave, but I do not agree with it, and I certainly do not have to be silent in representing my constituents' views, just as I accept that at the last general election those on the Conservative Benches won a majority, but I do not have to agree with every policy the Government seek to implement, and neither will I be silent about that. I also accept that the parliamentary numbers are such that article 50 will be triggered and Britain will leave the EU, but I believe, and will continue to believe, that leaving the EU is a

terrible mistake, and I cannot reconcile my overwhelming belief that to endorse the step that will make exit inevitable is wrong. I cannot endorse it, particularly when there have been no guarantees before triggering article 50 about protecting single market access, employment, environmental and consumer rights, security and judicial safeguards, and the residency rights of many of my constituents—and no guarantees for the people of Wales, never mind a seat at the negotiating table. I will not stay silent on the basis that to speak is to be anti-democratic, while the current Prime Minister leads us towards a brutal exit with all the damage that that will cause to the people and community I represent.

Serving as shadow Secretary of State for Wales reinforced even more strongly to me what Wales will lose from exiting the EU without the guarantees that are needed. We are net beneficiaries of EU funding to the tune of £245 million every year, and in the last 10 years EU-funded projects have helped to support nearly 73,000 people into work and 234,000 people to gain qualifications. Those projects have helped to create nearly 12,000 businesses and 37,000 new jobs. Sixty-eight per cent. of our exports go to EU countries, and parts of our farming and food production sector rely almost exclusively on the EU market.

The single market is the lifeline to our manufacturing industry—what is left of it—in steel, automotive and aerospace, as well as to our farming and food production sector, so I cannot accept the Prime Minister's decision that we are leaving the single market. The referendum result last year felt like a body blow, the Prime Minister's speech felt like the life-support machine being switched off, and triggering article 50 will, for me, feel like the funeral. It is a matter of principle and conscience to me, and I must represent the majority of my constituents and share their view. I will not vote for this Bill.

5.38 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), who spoke with great passion; I do not agree with her, but she is clearly wrestling with many issues.

This is a hugely significant moment for the west midlands region, part of which I represent, and for this House. It seems quite a long time ago that I was one of the 81 Conservatives who went into the Lobby to vote in favour of a referendum in 2011, and it also seems quite a long time ago that I was sitting behind the Front Bench in my role as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Europe as the European Union Referendum Bill was steered through Parliament. During its passage I had to spend many long hours in this Chamber wearing my tin hat, as it were. So I am a passionate believer in the referendum and I recognise the importance of the result.

I had concerns about the economic consequences of our leaving the European Union, but the reality was that the west midlands region was one of the strongest regions in the country in terms of voting to leave. I think every single area of the west midlands voted for us to leave the European Union. As a democrat, and as someone who fought for the referendum, I clearly have to respect that result. We in the Black country and the west midlands are very pragmatic people. The west midlands economy has been performing extremely well over the past few years, and it is now incumbent on me

and other leaders in the region to take advantage of the opportunities that leaving the European Union will present to our economy.

I hope that we will trigger article 50 when we vote tomorrow, and I want to mention certain factors that need to be taken into consideration in the negotiations. As I have said, the west midlands economy has been performing very well. It is currently one of the export powerhouses of the UK economy, with strong exporting not only to the European Union but to the United States and China. However, there are certain countries to which we do not export so strongly. They include Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia, where the west midlands has negligible export volumes. When we are looking at making free trade deals around the world, there will be an opportunity to facilitate further export potential for west midlands manufacturers in the transport sector, for example.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise, however, that if we do not get a deal—the Prime Minister has said that that is a possibility—we could end up with a 10% tariff on cars being exported from the UK? That would be very damaging to the west midlands car industry.

**James Morris:** I do not believe for a minute that we will not get a deal that will be of benefit to UK-based car manufacturers. It is inconceivable that we would be unable to get such a deal.

Leaving the European Union will give us an opportunity to achieve something that has eluded Governments over the past 25 to 30 years—namely, an opportunity to rebalance our economy and lock in the benefits of regional devolution. The west midlands has benefited from European grants for infrastructure development, and as we enter into the negotiation process, it will be incumbent on us to raise the investment levels for infrastructure and skills in the west midlands. For example, the west midlands currently receives 40% less investment in transport than London and Scotland. The region is dependent on manufacturing and transportation, and that discrepancy has resulted in capacity constraints in the west midlands economy that need to be addressed.

One of the principal reasons that people in the Black country and the west midlands voted to leave the European Union was that they wanted to control immigration. As we trigger article 50 and think about negotiating our exit, one of the most important factors will be for the Government to commit to raising the skill levels in the west midlands in order to create high-quality jobs, and to see the west midlands as a critical component of our national story. The west midlands needs to have a voice in the negotiations. In May this year, we will have a directly elected mayor for the West Midlands Combined Authority, and I hope that it will be Andy Street, the excellent Conservative candidate. As the region that voted the most decisively to leave, the west midlands must be at the head of the queue for getting the benefits that I believe can accrue from our leaving the European Union.

I also want to make a broader point about Britain's place in the world. Even though I have concerns about the European Union and voted for Britain to remain in it, I have never been a fan of its political structures. We are now on the cusp of an opportunity. For 40 years, we have spent a lot of diplomatic resource and energy on

managing our relationships across the EU. We now need to change our posture in the world, to be much more outward looking and to use our diplomatic reach and resources to change how we influence the world. We have enormous soft power to deploy in the world, and we should invest more in our hard power. That combination of diplomatic reach, soft power resources and the ability to deploy hard power gives a Britain outside the EU the unique opportunity to stop expending energy on it and its predilections and to focus outwards. As we embark on the renegotiation, there is a real opportunity to challenge many of the assumptions that have driven British foreign policy over the past 40 years and to forge a new role as a global, outward-looking Britain that works for all the regions of the United Kingdom.

5.45 pm

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): I am unable to support this Bill and the triggering of article 50. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I think that the whole operation is a bit like following a rabbit into the hole and hoping to emerge in Wonderland, with or without Alice.

Like my colleagues and many other Members, I do not seek to deny England or Wales their right to exit the European Union, if that is what the people of those nations have decided. I might disagree with the wisdom of that view, but that is not why I oppose the Bill. I have never pretended that the European Union was perfect or that it does not need reform—even radical reform—but the EU has delivered for Northern Ireland. It helped to deliver parity of esteem and prosperity for all sides of our community, and it has helped to bring peace in difficult times. European investment and access to the single market have done so much in the past 25 years to remake my city, Belfast. It is a world-leading city that faces the 21st century, having had a difficult 20th century, not least because of the hard work of hundreds of people who came to Belfast from across Europe to work and contribute positively to our society, and to help to build a better economy, in the process building prosperity.

I am here today on behalf of the people of South Belfast, where 70% voted to remain on a 70% turnout, so the result is without doubt. I ask the Government not to take away unnecessarily our membership of the EU, which has already done so much for my constituency and has the potential to do more. Queen's University Belfast in the heart of my constituency is highly dependent on EU funding for its research and development, but I have received no guarantees—in fact, I have little expectation—that the Government will match that funding post-Brexit.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have already said, both here and elsewhere, that they have no desire to return to the borders of the past. I am glad to hear that, and so are the 30,000 people who cross the Irish border every day for work, but they need a bit more than warm words of comfort. They need a concrete arrangement between Dublin, London, Belfast and Brussels to sustain reasonable access to their livelihoods, but the Government seem to have missed the fact that our concerns in Northern Ireland go much deeper than just avoiding border posts. Our membership of the EU is written throughout the fabric of the Good Friday agreement, or the Belfast agreement as some prefer to

[Dr Alasdair McDonnell]

call it. Our political settlement in 1998 keeps all our parties at the table and sustains a peace process, and hopefully a better prosperity process to follow. The EU values and rules that are written into the fabric of that agreement have helped to maintain stability. Without the EU, that stability would not have been obtained and maintained. Maintaining that stability and the settlement requires the principles of the Good Friday agreement to be underpinned in law throughout the exit process, both at the outset and in the final exit deal, and that is without even touching on the wider concerns that hon. Members have raised about the impact of Brexit on our universities, the rights of European citizens already living here and the rights of our own citizens who wish to study or work across the European Union.

Regardless of the Supreme Court's decision on the role of the devolved Administrations, which I beg to differ from, it is in the Government's interest to get this process right for Northern Ireland and to maintain the political stability that has been achieved. Indeed, as a co-guarantor of the 1998 Good Friday agreement, the Government are obliged to sustain that stability.

It will be much harder to get things right and to restore stability in Northern Ireland if we rush to meet an artificial timetable that has been imposed unnecessarily by the Government. That is why I call on them, even at this late stage, not to rush now and regret later. I beg them to take the time to get this right for all of us. Earlier today the Secretary of State told us to trust the wisdom of the people. Well, there is no one I trust more with the future of Northern Ireland than the people of Northern Ireland, and the people of Northern Ireland voted to remain. I remind the House that people in Belfast South voted by 70%, on a 70% turnout, to stay in Europe. I hope that I am representing them and their views here today. With no answers—or, at the very best, foggy answers—about the border, our economy and protecting parity of esteem, my colleagues and I cannot vote to support the triggering of article 50.

5.52 pm

**Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): There has been a lot of debate about whether the Government have a sufficient mandate not only to invoke article 50, but to exit the single market and the customs union. Many hon. Members might know that my involvement in that question did not begin when I was elected to this House in 2015. In the five years prior to then, I had the privilege of working in Downing Street. For me, the whole question of our membership of the EU is inextricably rooted in the conflict between control—principally of immigration and our own laws—on the one hand, and our membership of the single market on the other. In the decade that followed Tony Blair's disastrous decision to allow the new eastern European members of the EU to gain full access to the labour market without transitional controls, net migration from the EU went from being roughly in balance to being in the hundreds of thousands every year.

The application of the single market to the field of labour went from facilitating the free movement of labour around countries of roughly equal development to a mechanism for mass economic migration. That, in turn, was compounded by the fact that the UK had not

only no transitional controls, but an open, English-speaking labour market that is much more conducive to migrants. Latterly, the eurozone crisis meant that while much of Europe stagnated, a mercifully free United Kingdom became a jobs-creation engine that sucked labour from stagnant continental countries.

All that led to a growing sense of a loss of control. These were huge changes about which the British people were never asked and to which they never consented. That was why Conservative manifestos repeatedly committed us to reducing migration to the tens of thousands, but our experience in government demonstrated that that could not be achieved.

**Mr MacNeil:** Did the Conservative manifesto commit to staying in the single market?

**Oliver Dowden:** The Conservative manifesto committed us to renegotiation followed by an in/out referendum, which was exactly what we delivered. The whole argument I am making is that the question of EU membership is inextricably linked to that of the single market.

The problem with trying to control migration within the EU is that the Commission rigidly stuck to the doctrine that the free movement of people was one of the immovable pillars of the single market, and that any attempt to favour UK nationals over EU nationals was discriminatory and illegal. That was despite the fact that the whole reality of its application had changed since we initially agreed to single market membership, and that there was no similar perfect purity applied to the other pillars, particularly in services, in which the UK stood to be a major beneficiary of a pure single market.

**Mr Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester) (Con): Is it not the case that several EU countries now have deep concerns about the consequences of unfettered free movement and that the collapse of Schengen, albeit for different reasons, is further evidence of that?

**Oliver Dowden:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention; what he says is undoubtedly the case. The problem is that the Commission and other EU members move at a glacial speed, so there is unlikely to be a significant change in their approach to this pillar of the single market for some time.

Of course this issue was not the only factor, but it certainly gave strong impetus to the argument that the only way we could resolve the situation was through a policy of renegotiation followed by a referendum, which was what we fought the 2015 election on. Again, the Commission dogmatically refused to compromise on its conception of free movement, which was bolstered by Chancellor Merkel's experience of growing up as a child of East Germany and innate hostility to any imposition of borders. Going into the referendum, we therefore could not credibly say that significant control had been restored.

Pitted against that strong argument for leaving the EU was the significant economic risk and dislocation that arose from losing unfettered access to a market of half a billion people, which we had achieved through full membership of single market. The decision therefore was about a difficult balance between control and risk, which was why it was absolutely right to put such a

profound question to the British people in a referendum. We should be quite clear that the dilemma of EU membership was, in essence, the dilemma of our membership of the single market: the benefits of having free movement of goods, services and capital set against the loss of control over our laws and migration policy. These issues were the essence of the debate.

My innate conservatism favoured not taking that risk, but the British people took an alternative decision—this was whole point of asking them in the first place. So it is clear that not only should I respect that decision and vote to invoke article 50, but that I should also seek to implement it fully, which must mean leaving both the single market and the customs union. For people to claim that the Government do not have a mandate to do that is to completely ignore how we got to this situation in the first place.

Equally, however, we must be clear about the other choices that we have taken. I am glad that the economy has maintained momentum after the initial political decision to leave, and I am confident that in the medium to long term we can make a success of the huge liberation of leaving the EU. We can tailor our laws to meet the economic and trading interests of this country and those with which we choose to enter bilateral deals, rather than being bound by the lowest common denominator interests of a 27-member bloc. Indeed, we are well placed to exploit this position, as we have a centrally placed time zone, the English language, political stability, the rule of law, a competitive tax regime and tremendous creativity. But we should also not forget the risk we took by choosing to leave. I am sure that, in the short term, the depreciation of sterling is likely to lead to price rises this year, squeezing disposable income and consumer spending. The terms of our access to the single market will be different, causing short-term dislocation. Of course, the Commission and member states will initially—

**Ian Blackford:** The hon. Gentleman correctly points out that the fall in sterling will lead to an increase in inflation. This Government have frozen benefits for the next four years, so does not that action and the fact that the autumn statement shows that growth is going to be lower mean that, as a consequence, a lot of people will be very much poorer?

**Oliver Dowden:** Two things: first, record low unemployment means that there is tremendous opportunity for those people; and, secondly, wages across the board have not grown rapidly, so it is entirely right that constraint is applied to benefits.

Of course the Commission and member states will initially resist any deal that is not unambiguously seen as making the UK worse off from exiting the EU. I say that not to refight the battles of the past, but because if we expect the changes I have described, plan for them and manage them as the necessary consequences of the decisions we have taken, we will be better placed to see them through to opportunities in the long run. This is the beginning of a process of historic change in our nation, but it is a path we have chosen with our eyes open, through an exercise of our democratic rights, and we have many reasons to be optimistic. Government Members are now all on the same side, and we should seize the opportunities that this change of direction affords us.

6 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden).

I begin by associating myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens). I wish that I was not engaged in this debate tonight. I wish that we were not having to clear up this mess. I wish that the former right hon. Member for Witney had not cut and run but was here to help us to dig our way out of this hole. I am not surprised that he left, because he offered us a political strategy that was based on the ethos and ethics of the Bullingdon club: smash up the place, put some cash on the table, and leave it to others to clear up. I am not sure where the cash is—[*Interruption.*] As the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) knows, we appear to be half a trillion pounds further in debt than we were in 2010. Although I wish that we were not starting from this point, the people have voted. This is a democracy and I will respect the decision that was taken.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) hit the nail absolutely on the head. The people of this country did not vote for a plan or a blueprint. They did not vote to lose their jobs and they did not vote based on the full truth on the table. Indeed, the campaign was terrible, bedevilled with lies about what money would be saved and what money would be spent. There was, though, a vote to make Parliament sovereign, and we should start now by making sure that Parliament is sovereign over the plan. This must be the first debate of many, and tomorrow and in the coming days we will have the first votes of many. We will ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and his colleagues to come back to the House so that we can check whether they have got the answers right and their strategy sound.

As the Secretary of State sets about the negotiations, I want to ensure that three things are uppermost in his mind. First, we have to ensure that those who lose out from Brexit are helped and supported. We all know that there are people who will be battered and bruised by the Brexit process—there is no point pretending otherwise—but let us make sure that a plan is in place to support them. They are not the rich; they are the poor. As has been argued, they are the people whose tax credits have been frozen. As a result of that and the higher inflation that is now cursing fuel and food, they will be £620 a year worse off by the time of the next election. We need a plan for making sure that we do not waste £1 billion on corporate tax cuts by 2020. Let us use that money to unlock the freeze on benefits.

**John Redwood:** Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why we have been the fastest-growing G7 economy for the whole of the past year, with an acceleration in the second half, and why wages are up—real wages are up—and things are looking good?

**Liam Byrne:** I know that experts are no longer in fashion among Conservative Members, but the Office for Budget Responsibility is clear that, because of higher inflation, people on tax credits will be poorer, not richer, over the next couple of years. I genuinely believe that the Brexit Secretary does want to protect hard-working families, but let us see him put his money where his

[Liam Byrne]

mouth is by arguing with the Chancellor in favour of unfreezing tax credits over the next couple of years. That should be our priority.

Secondly, we need a real plan to protect manufacturing in this country. We must recognise that manufacturing output has not yet recovered to its level before the crash. The car industry in regions such as mine in the west Midlands employs 49,000 people today, but it will be destroyed if we have to rely on WTO tariffs of 10%, and if we add another 10% to costs by building a border to check the 60% of parts that we import to build the cars that are created in this country. Whatever deal is put in place, it must put manufacturing first.

Thirdly, we must ensure that there is no race to the bottom on rights—on workers' rights, social rights and the rights of minorities. We have already seen the briefing that has come out from a No. 10 source that the Conservatives' 2020 manifesto will propose exiting the European convention on human rights—that great European Magna Carta that we in this country helped to draw up after the war to stop any return to the holocaust that we marked last week. How can we possibly contemplate leaving that convention and joining the company of Putin's Russia? I hope that, over the course of these debates, we will hear a cast-iron guarantee that there will be no exit from the convention on human rights.

Finally, although tests are looming on how we protect those battered and bruised by Brexit, how we defend manufacturing, and how we ensure that there is no race to the bottom on rights, the spirit of these negotiations is important. I have to accept that we will leave a federal Europe, but I believe that now could be the start of a confederal project in which we begin to step up our collaboration with our neighbours on security, jobs, international development, science—the things that we can do together in the world. In this debate, it is so important now that we do not listen to the devils and demons of division. Now is the time for the Government to listen to the better angels of our nature.

6.6 pm

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): It was the country's first woman Prime Minister—this may of course arouse the ire of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies)—who said:

“In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.”

I am extremely pleased that our current Prime Minister is in place, because she is taking on an unbelievably difficult task and delivering it with intellect, grace and clarity. She has made very clear to this House, regardless of how we campaigned or voted, what the process and the timetable will be, and for that I am truly grateful.

The quote in this case is a little incorrect, because it has been men and women, over many years, who have debated endlessly in this place and elsewhere the European question—something that was a monumental talking point when I first came to this place. Rather confusingly, the debate did not seem to include talking about the issues that face this country and that will continue to face this country after our departure from the European Union, our puzzling and troubling productivity gap in British industry, our lack of skills, our lack of investment

in education, our problems with the low savings rate that mean that families have so little to fall back on and that the country has very little to draw on for investments going forward. Suddenly on 23 June, we all went from talking to doing. I totally agree with hon. Members that this is not the place to re-run either the referendum or the arguments—people will know that I was a remain supporter.

Like so many who have spoken today, I was appalled by the quality of the debate and of the conversations that took place. We were asking the country to make a very profound decision on the basis of slogans. Extremely complicated questions and trade-offs were boiled down into a single yes or no question. The whole issue was spiced up with anti-immigration rhetoric. I am sorry for hon. Members who believe that that was not what the leave campaign represented. I thought that the breaking point poster of people wanting to come into this country was a particularly low point in the debate. The conversation was also sullied by misrepresentation over funding. We have debated today the £350 million and the £100 million or whatever it was. On foreign policy, what has happened to those conversations about Turkey, which, if we listened to many Members who were campaigning for a certain side, was lined up to join the EU?

Equally, I accept that it was the remain side that gave us project fear. We were not given positive measures on which to campaign. What about staying connected or staying relevant in the world, rather than frightening people with theoretical models, which, thanks to quantitative easing and an interest rate cut, have yet to come true?

Since the referendum result, the Government, ably led by our Prime Minister, have taken the pragmatic approach that we are where we are and that what we need is strength and leadership. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said earlier, the major problem facing us and representatives of other western democracies is a crisis of trust in our institutions and politicians. Therefore I will, like so many others, vote with the Government tomorrow night to support the triggering of article 50.

We will never be able to prove the counterfactual: what would have happened if we had not voted to leave, without the depreciation in currency and the changes already happening in the European Union. I, for one, feel ill-informed about this debate. I went back to the debates held in this House at the time when we joined the EU, which started with the publication of a White Paper in 1967 and ended with the referendum in 1975. I have read the speeches given by Charles Morrison, my predecessor but one, who contributed to those debates; he was an arch-European, I am pleased to say. He was given the opportunity to take part in extensive debates over six White Papers in the formation of a manifesto for the 1970 election and in multiple conversations with Parliament.

Indeed, the White Paper presented by the Heath Government in 1971 reported back on the progress of negotiations that had been made until that point between the British Government and members of the then small European Economic Community, and set out what areas still needed to be discussed. Compared with my predecessor, I do not feel well informed about the process and the trade-offs for the British economy. I reject wholeheartedly the idea that people voted one way or another in the referendum based on some perfect

knowledge of all the facts. I sat through many a hustings in which my opponents said, “It’s not for us to define what leave looks like. You’re the Government—it’s your job. We just know that we want to be out.” Everybody’s view of Brexit is slightly different.

As we near the end of the two-year process, how do we assure ourselves and our constituents that we are making the right decision? First, I urge the Government to be as open and transparent as possible and to bring forward the White Paper before the Bill goes into Committee. When we get to the end of the process and there is a binary offer—we will be either in some form of relationship with the European Union or not—I ask the Government to say what the economic consequences of those deals look like. We cannot possibly sit down and make an assessment of what a free trade world—or, indeed, a relationship with the EU, plus or minus any economic contribution we would be asked to make—might look like without understanding the implications for our country. Perhaps we have made a good decision for all the wrong reasons, but I do not yet feel that we have the right information to justify that to the country.

6.12 pm

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): In this country, we have settled, through a process of trial and error, on a system of parliamentary democracy as the most effective form of governance. The importance of Parliament’s role was once again asserted by the Supreme Court last week. The responsibility of parliamentarians is clear: to take decisions in the best interests of the country with particular regard for the needs of their constituents. I believe that leaving the European Union will be hugely damaging for this country; the British people, through the referendum, narrowly expressed a different view. It is now up to Parliament to take account of the result of the referendum and decide what is in the best interests of the country.

There is no evidence, and none has been presented, that the best interests of the country will be served by the immediate triggering of article 50 and the pursuit of the hardest Brexit possible. It seems to me an abdication of responsibility to say that the only factor that can be considered in deciding whether to trigger article 50 is the result of the referendum. “The will of the people” cannot be tied down to one single point and be presumed never to change or waver. It should not be assumed that the decision of a narrow majority of people, willing and entitled to express a view on 23 June, should be the only thing to determine the fate of the whole population for now and many decades into the future. This is not the end of the debate; it is only the beginning.

**Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): The Conservative manifesto on which we won the election stated that we would hold a referendum and uphold its result. That is a promise made and a promise kept. Does the hon. Lady accept that?

**Sarah Olney**: There has been a lot of talk about the European Union Referendum Act 2015. I was not here. I did not vote for it. I am not bound by it. The Conservative party’s 2015 manifesto also committed us to staying in the single market.

If, in three or eight years’ time, the people are not happy with the outcome of Brexit, who should they hold accountable? If they want the country to take a different course, how should they vote then? Will all

their MPs step back and tell them that they merely implemented the will of the people and that the outcome of Brexit is not their responsibility? Denying the people the right to hold their representatives accountable would be truly undemocratic.

I asked the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union a question last week about what impact assessments had been done to estimate the loss of jobs and skills to the UK as a consequence of leaving the European Union. I was told that such information could not be released because it would weaken our negotiating hand. That is extremely worrying for two reasons. First, if the information exists—the Minister who responded did not confirm that such assessments have been carried out—it is not available to the public to read and consider. Secondly, our country’s future prosperity, including our jobs and skilled workers, now depends so heavily on the outcome of a negotiation.

Far from taking back control, we are apparently dependent on what other countries will, or will not, allow. There is so much that we do not know about the consequences of leaving the European Union, either because the Government refuse to reveal it or because it depends on the outcome of negotiations. We have not been given sight of the Government’s White Paper before being asked to consider the Bill. We are effectively being asked to jump out of an airplane without knowing whether we are securely attached to a parachute, and that is not a responsible approach to take to the security and prosperity of our citizens.

If we do make the decision to trigger article 50, our most immediate and pressing goal will be to advance negotiations with our European partners as quickly as possible to provide security and clarity for our citizens, but it is important that we do not just settle for whatever result we can get. We should make a further, active and informed decision that the new deal is a better alternative than remaining in the European Union. The choice should be between those two outcomes. Having held an initial referendum to ask the public to guide our decision making on the issue, we cannot exclude them from the final decision. There needs to be a referendum on the terms so that the people can decide for themselves.

The decisions that we make in this place over the coming days will shape our country for future generations, and we owe it to them to proceed with caution, thoughtfulness and care. My grandparents’ generation gifted us a country free from tyranny, and my parents’ generation gifted us a country of rising prosperity. When I think of the country that I would like my generation to give to our children, I think of a country that lives without fear, poverty and inequality, but we cannot build that world by turning our back on our neighbours, closing the door to our friends, turning a blind eye to tyranny or walking hand in hand with intolerance.

I will vote against the Bill tomorrow not just because I represent a pro-remain party in a pro-remain constituency, nor because I made this commitment to voters during my recent by-election campaign. Most of all, I will vote against the Bill because triggering article 50 is the wrong step for this country to take at this time.

6.18 pm

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), who has reassured us

[Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg]

once again that the Liberal Democrats do not believe in democracy. It is slightly incongruous that they should be in that position.

Today, in fact, we celebrate one of the days that will go down in the annals of British history. There are many years in British history that we can call to mind, such as 1066 or 1215—[*Interruption.*] How many do you want? Great and famous years include 1346, 1485, 1509, 1588 and 1649, but it is very rare that specific days are commemorated as I think 23 June 2016 will be. It is on a par with St Crispin's day 1415 and with 18 June 1815, which were great days in our nation's history. We are here debating the matter because our constitution has been put back on a proper footing by the wisdom of the British people, and also, as it happens, by the Supreme Court. I am particularly pleased by page 29 of the judgment, which says:

“For these reasons, we disagree with Lloyd LJ's conclusion in *Rees-Mogg* in so far as he held that ministers could exercise prerogative powers to withdraw from the EU Treaties.”

The judges, though it has taken a year or two, finally agreed that in 1993 my father was right. So there is a virtue in this judicial process, slow and long-winded though it may be.

This is important constitutionally because Dicey's constitution has been restored. The Queen in Parliament is the sovereign body of our nation. That is so important because, as Dicey argued, it is Parliament that is the defender of the liberties of the people, of our ancient constitution, and of our freedoms.

**Ian Blackford:** As a constitutional expert, the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the judgment in the case of *MacCormick v. The Crown* by Lord Cooper in Scotland that parliamentary sovereignty is a purely English concept that has no parallel in Scottish constitutional history. Does he agree, therefore, that the Scottish people can determine their own destiny if we are dragged out of Europe against our will?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The hon. Gentleman will know that following the Act of Union the Westminster Parliament was the inheritor Parliament of both Parliaments, and therefore the two traditions, to some extent, merged in 1707. He is very well aware of that point. The sovereignty of Parliament now applies to the United Kingdom as a whole.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is, as ever, making a fantastic speech. Following on from the intervention by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), is it not also the case that in the Supreme Court judgment the justices make it clear that we do not need a legislative consent motion, or indeed any consent from any devolved institution, because Dicey's principle that power devolved is power retained means that this Parliament is always sovereign?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The judgment is completely clear that the Sewel convention is a political convention that it is not within the field of the judiciary to rule on. The judges say that they

“are neither the parents nor the guardians of”

the Sewel convention, but they also make it clear that by legislation this Parliament can do anything within the United Kingdom on behalf of the British people.

We need to go back to the beginning. Where does this parliamentary sovereignty come from? We are back to the debates of the 17th century. Parliamentary sovereignty in this country was thought to come either via the King from God or to Parliament via the people. That is where referendums so rightly come in, because the sovereignty we exercise is not sovereignty in a vacuum. It is not sovereignty that has descended on us from on high; it builds up from underneath. The people of the United Kingdom have an absolute right to determine how they are governed, and on 23 June—

**Patrick Grady** *rose*—

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** *rose*—

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I cannot give way again because I do not get any more bonus points.

On 23 June, the people voted that parliamentary sovereignty would be restored to this House. The judges in the Supreme Court decision reinforced that, because they reversed the clawing of power from this House that has gone to the Executive since the European Communities Act 1972. This is where the shocking, outrageous and monstrous hypocrisy of the pro-Europeans clicks into place—none of them are Members of this place, of course, for no Members of this place are ever in any sense hypocritical, as we all know. The pro-Europeans cried parliamentary sovereignty to obstruct the will of the British people, as law after law cascaded down from the European Union to a Chamber that was empty and to Committee rooms where debates were over in 30 minutes. There was no interest in parliamentary sovereignty when the ratchet was clawing it away from the United Kingdom, but a great cry when the British people asked to have it back for themselves.

The Supreme Court has recognised that this House is where power must lie in the creating and repealing of laws. This will restore our proper constitutional balance, so that no more will we have talk of superior legislation. The courts had developed a theory from the 1972 Act that it was superior law, and that laws passed after it were bound by it. That is alien to the British constitution. This House has no ability to bind its successors, and that principle is being restored by leaving the European Union and repealing, ultimately, the 1972 Act. Once that is done, the thread on which the idea of superior law has been hung will be cut, and we will be back to a situation in which a Parliament of five years can pass any laws for this country but cannot bind its successors, and its laws can in no way be overruled by anybody outside the Queen in Parliament.

The great virtue of the constitution—this is where I agree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart)—is that it has provided prosperity, peace and security for our nation. The economy is not created out of nowhere; it depends on the existing constitutional structures that protect the rule of law, allow corruption to be exposed by freedom of speech, enable the democratic will to act as the protector of what is decided and ensure that property rights are respected.

We are returning to the happy constitutional system that was known in this country until 1972. In the glories of our constitution, and with the great wisdom of our

parliamentary draftsmen, we are doing it in one of the shortest Bills ever to pass through this House. All that this Bill does—and this is why the amendments are all such flotsam and jetsam designed to obstruct the will of the British people—is to implement the noble, brave and glorious decision that the people made on that day of legend and song, the twenty-third of June in the year of our Lord 2016.

6.27 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased to be following the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who set out an erudite constitutional perspective for our edification. Of course, there are wholly honourable reasons for wanting to leave the European Union. The problem, however, is that we will pay a heavy economic price for leaving. Too many jobs will be forced out of the UK, and for that reason I shall oppose the Bill at the vote on Second Reading tomorrow.

**Michael Gove**: The right hon. Gentleman's prediction that jobs will be lost follows the prediction made by so many that staying outside the single currency would lead to economic decline, and indeed that the vote on 23 June would trigger an instant recession. Those predictions were wrong then; with respect to his integrity, why should we believe these predictions now?

**Stephen Timms**: It is absolutely clear that there will be a heavy economic price. Within a couple of years, that will be absolutely clear. My view is that if we in this House believe that a measure is contrary to the national interest, we should vote against it. We have heard a couple of speeches from Conservative Members who have said in terms that they think that the Bill is contrary to the national interest. If that is the view of Members of this House, we should vote against the Bill.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his opening words. I believe that the Bill will make our constituents poorer, and that is why I will join him tomorrow in the Lobby. Is it not a pity that part of the debate was basically to ignore what experts were saying about the destination of our country should we leave the European Union?

**Stephen Timms**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think we should pay attention to those who know what they are talking about. The reality is that our currency has fallen significantly in value following the referendum, and that means that we are poorer than we were before. But the real damage will be done when jobs start to be forced out of Britain, as they will be over the next few years.

I know that some people argue that the loss of jobs in Britain will be a price worth paying in the short term for a better long-term future. I do not agree with that view. The fact is that we will always be dependent on close partnerships with other countries. I cannot share the view that we would be better off replacing annoying interference from Brussels with annoying interference from Washington, but that appears to be what some people believe we should head towards.

**John Redwood**: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Timms**: I am afraid that I cannot give way again.

In any case, we must not dismiss short-term job losses during the next few years as unimportant. The Prime Minister rightly aims for barrier-free access to the single market. The problem is that without signing up to at least some version of free movement she stands no chance whatever of getting barrier-free access to the single market.

In this House, we need to be frank with people about our prospects during the next few years. For example, many of my constituencies and those of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) work in the financial sector in the City of London, and one study suggests that 70,000 jobs will be lost in that one sector alone. There will be such a scale of damage in other parts of the economy as well. In my view, that is much too high a price to pay.

I agree with those who say that the various forms of so-called soft Brexit would not solve the problem. We would then end up having to apply all the rules that are devised in the EU without having any influence at all over what the rules are. That is not a viable position for the UK in the future.

The one glimmer of a Brexit without the economic damage I am concerned about would be if we signed up not to the current version of the free movement of people, but to a form of free movement of labour in which EU citizens could come to the UK if they had a firm job offer in the UK. As I understand it, that is how things worked in the Common Market in the past. If we agreed to something along those lines, I believe that it would buy us a good proportion of the barrier-free access to the single market that the Prime Minister says she wants. However, she seems to have set her face against such a concession on the immigration policy that is needed, and we will therefore pay the price.

I must say that it is very strange that our future economic wellbeing is being relegated to the importance of focusing on reducing net migration to the tens of thousands. The Prime Minister was Home Secretary for six years. In that time, non-EU net migration, which was completely under our control, was nowhere near the tens of thousands—last year, it was 150,000—and of course all EU net migration comes on top of that. The only way the target of bringing down net migration to the tens of thousands could be delivered would be at an extraordinary economic cost to the UK. I do not believe that any Government would be willing to sign up to that.

How have we got ourselves into such a mess? I think the problem was hard-wired in once David Cameron removed his MEPs from the main centre-right bloc in the European Parliament. From that moment on, British influence in the EU diminished. It was increasingly clear that, unlike under Conservative and Labour Governments in the past, the Conservative coalition Government in the UK were unable to get their way in debates in the EU because their influence was so diminished.

An example that I am particularly aggrieved about was the failure of our Government to protect the viability of cane sugar refining in the EU, as practised at the Tate & Lyle sugar refinery in my constituency. Previous Governments—Labour and Conservative—were able to secure the future of cane sugar refining. This Government, tragically, have failed. The failure of the British Government to achieve their objectives in negotiations in the EU is a reflection of the loss of UK influence. The most spectacular

[Stephen Timms]

failure of all was, of course, David Cameron's failure to secure a meaningful renegotiation in his last efforts as Prime Minister.

My conclusion is that what we actually need is a much more engaged British Government who are able to win arguments in Brussels, as previous British Governments were able to do. The failure of David Cameron's attempted renegotiation highlights spectacularly just how big a problem has developed, but we should not now be pulling out all together and I will be opposing the Second Reading of the Bill tomorrow night.

6.35 pm

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): I only want to make a short contribution on what in my opinion is quite rightly a very short Bill.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) is about to leave the Chamber, but I remind her that her leader, on 11 May 2016, said that this was a once-in-a-lifetime decision. I would have happily given way to her to allow her to tell us whether she agrees with her leader, but clearly that opportunity has been lost.

I voted with a large majority of this House for the Prime Minister to sign article 50 by the end of March. I would be very disappointed if the House did not now pass the proposed legislation to facilitate that. I get the impression that some in this place are trying to frustrate the clear will of the House and, more importantly, the people, by adding matters that surely should be left for the White Paper and the wider negotiation with the EU.

**Lady Hermon:** I am not—I emphasise I am not—trying to frustrate the will of the people of the United Kingdom. I am a Unionist. I am trying to keep the United Kingdom together. This House needs to be aware and sensitive to the fact that Sinn Féin, the republican party with four absentee Members of this House, is using the Brexit decision to campaign for an increased vote in the Assembly election. That is my reason for voting against the Bill. It has nothing to do with breaking up the Union; I want to maintain the Union.

**Mrs Murray:** I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Lady has clarified her position. I am sure her words have been taken on board by everybody.

Let us not tie our Prime Minister's hands. I ask the House to respect the will of the people in my constituency and the wider country who voted to leave. Let us pass the Bill, trigger article 50 and get on with leaving the European Union as our masters, the public, instructed us on 23 June.

6.38 pm

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I am minded to support the Bill on Second Reading because, like my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), I respect the overall referendum outcome even though I campaigned for a different result. I believe that the Government are entitled to commence the leave negotiations by 31 March, but that we are entitled to some assurances about their intentions and the way they plan to proceed. I do not think the limited time allowed for the Bill is right. It would be possible to allow more time and still meet the Government's deadline.

The impression that the Prime Minister and her Ministers have given since she assumed power is that they want to silence MPs, sideline Parliament and rely solely on their interpretation of the referendum result. It looks increasingly as if that means ignoring the views of the 48% who voted remain and even of the larger number who voted leave when it comes to issues such as the single market. The hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) said in an intervention that it was only a two-clause Bill and she did not understand the need for a White Paper, but is it sensible to embark on an epic journey without some idea of where we will end up or how we will get there? It is one thing to give approval to start the negotiations but something else to wash our hands of our constituents' concerns and give the Government a free hand to do just as they please.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Does the hon. Gentleman not acknowledge that the Prime Minister has already promised to issue that White Paper at the earliest opportunity?

**Steve McCabe:** I acknowledge that after a lifetime of denials the Prime Minister said she would issue a White Paper and that we might now get it after the vote on the Bill. That does not seem like much use to me.

The referendum, as has been pointed out, settled the question about our wish to leave the EU, but it did not shape the answer. When the Prime Minister eventually broke her silence in the Lancaster House speech to reveal her intention to disengage entirely from the single market, I do not accept she was reflecting the views of a majority of people in this country. We need to try to ensure continued access to that market on the best terms we can secure and in a way that does not exclude us from regulatory decisions. Without that we risk jobs and businesses and we risk setting in train a period of uncertainty that might do untold damage to our economy.

I accept that the Prime Minister's position is influenced by her desire to end freedom of movement, but where is the evidence that all those who voted leave actually wanted to prioritise their concerns about freedom of movement over access to the market for our goods and services? Why is it unreasonable to try to reach agreement on controls on freedom of movement? As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said, why is it so wrong to seek fair movement arrangements allowing for those we need to come here and work, while placing restrictions on lower skilled labour and those not in demand? It might help if the Government were to indicate, as a positive gesture, that they will not use the rights of EU citizens already living and working here as a bargaining chip. That would not be a massive concession, given that the Home Office has already calculated that 80% of EU migrants living here after 2019 will be entitled to permanent residency.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about protecting the rights of EU citizens contributing to and living in the country, but does he not accept that it is the other countries in the EU that are potentially using this issue as a bargaining chip, rather than this Government, and that it is difficult to enter into negotiations unless we have a similar agreement from them to protect the rights of British citizens living elsewhere in Europe?

**Steve McCabe:** I am proposing that one way to start the negotiations is to offer up a gesture of good will.

We are talking about people mostly engaged in crucial jobs that help to support and secure the jobs of many other British citizens. They were told that the referendum was a decisive result, but it could not have been much closer, and there are many parts of the UK, and indeed England, that did not vote to leave. My constituency voted by a majority of just over 2,000 to remain, but—to break that down further—two of four wards voted to remain and two voted to leave. I have no intention of speaking up only for the views of one group and ignoring the feelings and opinions of the others.

Rather helpfully, I carried out quite an extensive survey of my constituents in Selly Oak following the referendum, because of the closeness of the result and my wish better to understand what people were telling me. Sixty-four per cent said that they want the UK to continue to trade our goods and services within the single market, 76% think that we should commit to giving EU citizens already living and working here the right to remain, and people made clear their concerns about the cost of living, research funds and training programmes, employment and job security. We cannot simply leave those things to chance. We need to know the Government's approach, hence the importance of the White Paper.

How are we to proceed? Will we have three strands: administrative, legal and trade? Will we try to deal with them all at once or sequentially? Will there be parallel WTO negotiations and talks with other countries. Who are our negotiators? Exactly how many do we have? Do we have the capacity for so many complex negotiations in so short a time? Do we have enough experts—I was going to say that I knew that would upset someone, but he has left the Chamber—at our disposal? We need to know what progress is being made on the bright new world that enthusiastic Brexiteers are promising.

I want to be optimistic about our future, and I was slightly encouraged in that by some elements of Government thinking in the recent Green Paper “Building our Industrial Strategy”, but I do not feel sufficiently optimistic to want to trust our future to those who lied their way through the referendum, making promises of extra money for our health service that they have no intention of honouring. It is for those reasons that this House needs the Labour amendments, with regular feedback on the shape and progress of the negotiations, a right to intervene on the final offer and a right to reject that offer if it is plainly against the interests of the vast majority of our constituents.

6.47 pm

**Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con):** I was a remainer and I think it was a mistake to leave. I still think it is a mistake to leave, but that decision has been taken and tomorrow night the House will respect the decision. The question now is not whether we are leaving but where we shall arrive. We must focus on the best way of securing that, not only in our interest but in the interests of the whole continent. We need to grasp the opportunities of Brexit, which do exist, and their significance. The Prime Minister was right to say that she is going to seek a bold and ambitious trade agreement with the EU. Anything that disrupts trade is likely to diminish it and, therefore, output. A deal that safeguards both the UK

and our counterparties from that disruption is therefore much needed, and in practice there may be only a little over a year to negotiate it.

So, a transitional arrangement—probably a formal agreement—is going to be absolutely essential. Without it, firms in the financial sector, for example, will act pre-emptively to protect their shareholders from the consequences of a cliff edge. A large number of them have given evidence to the Treasury Committee on exactly that point, and they are not all making it up. The action they will take has already begun in a small way, and it is much more than just brass plating. We need to be clear that the absence of a transitional agreement will cost jobs and economic activity, at least in the short to medium term, and we should not just let that business slip away.

A clear and early commitment from the Government to a transitional period—what I and a number of others have been calling a standstill—at the end of the article 50 process should be priority No. 1 for agreement at the start of the negotiations.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee for giving way. Does he agree that such transitional arrangements are not only in our national interest, but in the interests of every other EU member state, which is why they should agree to the Government's suggestion sooner rather than later?

**Mr Tyrie:** I agree. Other states have an opportunity to agree a deal, because it would be obtainable under qualified majority voting, and does not require unanimity, as a careful look at article 50 shows, although that point was not initially understood.

If the UK leaves the customs union, a huge amount of work will be required to develop and enforce rules of origin. Despite the extra bureaucracy, I still think there is merit in leaving. If the greatest opportunities turn out to be in Asia in the medium to long term, as many forecast, we should put the country in a position to benefit. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who is no longer in his place, that a liberal economic internationalism should underpin everything we try to develop in our trade relations.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** I agree with much of what my hon. Friend has had to say. Does he agree that TheCityUK's analysis has, it would appear, changed dramatically? Like him, it can see the advantages that might come from Brexit, having once been of the opinion that Brexit would be the worst possible thing for this country's financial sector.

**Mr Tyrie:** TheCityUK did say that it was the worst possible thing for the financial sector, and it has clearly decided that the best thing to do is to look for the opportunities rather than spend time moaning about where we are. On the basis of what I read on my iPad on my way to the debate, it has focused on the point about the customs union.

The Treasury Committee has heard convincing evidence that both parties in the negotiations—both the EU and ourselves—have a lot to gain from maintaining a high degree of access to the single market, and a lot to lose from the absence of such access. We should bear it in

[Mr Tyrie]

mind that the EU, like the UK, benefits from our integration with European supply chains in the automotive and aerospace sectors, for example, and we all benefit from access to London's deep and liquid financial markets, which lowers the cost of capital to European firms, and of course to British firms. Restructuring manufacturing supply chains would cost both sides a lot; so, too, would the fragmentation of the financial markets.

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

**Mr Tyrie:** I will not, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, for the same reason previously mentioned—I will not get any extra injury time.

Unlike the customs union, access to the single market is certainly not a binary choice: a wide variety of options is possible. We do not need to look into the crystal ball; we can read the book. Switzerland has better access than Saudi Arabia; Canada has better access than Columbia. Reverting to WTO rules would be a huge risk for the UK—one that we should do a great deal to avoid.

There is a majority in the country for leaving, and if that means anything it must mean an end to the direct applicability of EU law and the restoration of control over EU migration. We should also bear it in mind that there is certainly a majority in the country for a high degree of continued engagement with our closest neighbours, which many on the continent also want. Huge advantages can flow from maintaining a high degree of political and economic engagement from outside the EU. It can be as economically beneficial as it will be politically expedient to try to construct it. It can help heal the Brexit wounds to which the Prime Minister referred in her outstanding speech, and it can address the deep unease that seems to be developing about Brexit among the young. Many of them are rejecting much of the irrationality of current political discourse coming out of Washington, and many are certainly rejecting the populist economic nationalism that President Trump represents, which some also attribute to Brexit.

In demonstrating that we understand and are responding to those voices of concern, we can win support at home, and we can construct alliances among our counterparties abroad by making it clear that we want to engage deeply with the EU from outside. That is why, if we can avoid the politics of unreason and avoid, too, the divisions at home and abroad that a disorderly and confrontational Brexit could bring, we can still reap considerable opportunities from the Brexit decision.

6.54 pm

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): I, too, supported the argument for remaining in the European Union, and I would do so again. Nevertheless, I respect the decision that was made in the referendum; hence my support, without qualifications, for the Second Reading of this Bill.

I am not generally in favour of referendums. As I am a strong upholder of representative democracy, it would be a contradiction for me to advocate referendums on various topics. The fact remains, however, that, in February 2016, four months before the referendum, the Cabinet Office said:

“The result of the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union will be final.”

It would be unfortunate if the view were taken that the votes of some people, for example in the Black country in the west midlands, where there were strong majorities for leaving—in my borough in Walsall, and in the other three boroughs—were considered to be less important than others.

I fully respect the strongly held views of those who do not and cannot support the Bill's Second Reading. Nevertheless, they are not my views, which is why I think it important that the decision made in the referendum—a majority decision—should be accepted. It is said that the majority was narrow. Of course it was narrow, but so have been the results of many general elections. It is said that lies were told. Certainly many lies were told by the leave people—I do not think there is any doubt about that—but it must be said that lies have been told in general elections as well.

One of the ironies is the fact that the leave campaigners laid a great deal of emphasis on the sovereignty of Parliament. Parliament, it was said, should be supreme. It should not be subject to the European Union. But what happened in this case? When it came to triggering article 50, instead of arranging the kind of debate that we are having now, the Government went to the courts and tried to use the royal prerogative. What kind of respect for the sovereignty of the House did the Government show by going to the courts? I am very pleased that the courts did what they did. Far from being the enemies of the people, the judges were the defenders of parliamentary democracy. We should be very grateful indeed for the decision of the High Court, reaffirmed by the Supreme Court.

Immigration, or the free movement of labour—whichever label or category we wish to specify—was undoubtedly an issue during the referendum campaign. There were strong feelings. One does not have to be a racist, or prejudiced, to want to leave the European Union. There were, of course, people who were deeply prejudiced, and perhaps racist, who did want to leave; I would not question that for one moment. However, many others, indeed the majority, who voted to leave were not racist, but had and continue to have strong feelings about immigration. I may well be wrong about this, but I believe that if the European Union had shown some flexibility on the free movement of labour, this debate might well not be taking place. I might add that if the EU examined the issue now, there might well be far less ammunition for the parties of the far right in the 27 states.

As so many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, leaving the European Union must not lead to a backward right-wing agenda. Many laws have arisen from membership of the EU, on, for instance, protection for workers and the combating of gender discrimination—and, indeed, any sort of discrimination. Rules and regulations of that kind must be defended at all costs. Since the start of my political life, and perhaps even before that, I have fought discrimination, in Parliament and outside, and I shall continue to do so until the crematorium makes its claim.

Leaving the European Union must not mean less co-operation in the combating of criminality and other problems. Above all else, the Government must learn this lesson about the royal prerogative: the ongoing negotiations that will take place must be subject to

debates in the House from time to time. There must be statements from Ministers. We cannot have a situation where Parliament is silent until the outcome of the talks; a sovereign Parliament, which we say we are, has a right to have statements and to have questions put to Ministers about what is going to go on in the next two or so years on this very important issue.

7 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15),*

That, at this day's sitting, the Second Reading of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until midnight.—(*Mr Lidington.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Debate resumed.*

*Question again proposed,* That the amendment be made.

7 pm

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this historic debate, and it is right that we have the opportunity to discuss the triggering of article 50 and the passage of this Bill.

My postbag has been heavy with correspondence from many constituents writing to ask me what happens next. The British people voted for a change in our relationship with the European Union. They went to the polls to vote on the future of the UK's relationship with the EU, many because they wanted to preserve the status quo and some because they wanted change. Indeed, for a lot of people it was simply the first time they had the opportunity to have their say on the relationship between the UK and the union it first joined in 1973.

This was a national referendum with a huge turnout on both sides of the debate. The country voted to leave, and, although I was of the opinion that we should remain in the EU and voted that way, I fully respect the democratic process, and I respect the result. My constituency of Cheadle also voted, with a high turnout, to remain in the EU.

There have been many arguments about whether the referendum was advisory, or whether we as MPs should vote with our conscience or according to our constituency result. In my view, I must vote in line with my understanding and belief when I went through the Lobby and voted for the legislation to enable the referendum to take place. I believed that whatever the result, the intention was to uphold the majority view of the people of the country as expressed in the referendum. However, in common with many Members who have spoken today, I understand that there will be people in my constituency who voted to remain who are not where they want to be today, but the question was put and the vote taken, and it is right for the Government to proceed with triggering article 50.

It has been said that this vote is not just about business and the economy, but about the future and what is good for our children and grandchildren.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very clear point. I, too, was of the opinion to remain, but my constituency voted out and I am

going to abide by the views of my constituency and the country. Does she agree that we must now make the absolute best of this, and show everybody that this is the right thing and we will do the right thing by them?

**Mary Robinson:** I agree with my hon. Friend. This is about looking forward. It is about the future of our children and grandchildren, and I believe that, in building a strong economy and providing the jobs our children need, we are doing our best for them. Indeed, thanks to the good work of this Government over the past six years, unemployment has halved in my constituency and stands at 1.3%. Therefore, support for business should be, and is, at the forefront of my thinking. We have to make sure that, when leaving the EU, we get the right deal for businesses, not only those with existing strong and historical trading relationships with the EU, but also many more businesses that would like to embrace the opportunities to trade across the world. Many international businesses are headquartered in my constituency and they must be confident following this vote that the Government will put their best interests at the forefront of negotiations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who is no longer in his place, spoke about his hopes and aspirations for the west midlands and the opportunities for regions and devolution. I have often spoken in support of the northern powerhouse. I do not doubt the resolve of the people and businesses in my region to rise to the challenge of life outside the EU, or our ability to continue to create jobs and growth, to rebalance our economy and to make a success of new trading relationships.

I believe that we have a lot to be optimistic about. We should build on Britain's strengths with an industrial strategy that will back Britain for the long term. The north of England is recognised across the world as home to billions of pounds-worth of exciting opportunities for international investors, and we must capitalise on that. Indeed, the Government have already supported significant investment to rebalance our economy and usher in a new era of manufacturing and innovation. This includes spending £13 billion on transport, investing in state-of-the-art scientific projects and supporting small and medium businesses, which are the lifeblood of my constituency. In Greater Manchester, this will be backed up with a landmark political deal to give powers through the Government's localism agenda.

We have the opportunity, at this moment of national change, to step back and truly think about the country we want to be, and to redefine our relationship with the rest of the world. We must use our most precious and abundant national resource, the determination of our people, to build a competitive economy on which to create a society that works for everyone. We have done this in the past, and I am confident that this will not change as we contemplate life outside the EU. It is with confidence in my constituents, in our businesses large and small and in the resolve of the British people that I rise to support the Bill.

7.6 pm

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I am pleased that the Leader of the House moved the motion for extra time, and I am pleased to have been called to speak early in that extra time. This has been a long debate on a Bill

[Albert Owen]

that will confer power on the Prime Minister to notify the European Union of the UK's intention to withdraw from the EU. The decision to withdraw was made by the people in a referendum. Referendums divide opinion, and this one was no exception. I was a little disappointed in the Secretary of State's opening remarks. He did not set the right tone, in that he did not say to those who voted in a different way that we were going to speak for the whole country.

The electorate of Ynys Môn voted to leave the European Union. The people of Wales voted to leave the European Union, as did the people of the United Kingdom. The turnout in all those areas was more than 70%; it was 74% in my constituency. I said during and after the referendum campaign that I would respect the vote of the people. I said the same thing in 1997 when we had the referendum on setting up the National Assembly for Wales. That referendum had a much smaller turnout and a much narrower result, and I accepted that result. I was also one of the few supporters of the alternative vote, but I accepted that our country did not want to change the voting system. I have made that pledge to respect the vote of the people, and for that reason I will, with a heavy heart, support the Second Reading of the legislation that will trigger article 50.

I have also pledged to continue to get the best deal for my constituents and for the country, and I will stick to that. The best possible deal would involve a clear plan and participation in the single market. It is important to get the language right when we talk about participation; it means working with our near neighbours in the single market. I welcome the White Paper that was presented to the Government by the First Minister of Wales and the leader of Plaid Cymru. It is important for the UK Government to consult the Governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, including through the Joint Ministerial Committee. I shall therefore support Labour's new clause 4 in Committee. I hope that the Minister is listening, because the Government have said that they want to work together, and now that we are triggering article 50, we should continue the good partnership that we have with the people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland through the devolved Assemblies. We also need the Government to publish an impact assessment so that we can determine the impact of leaving the single market and the customs union, and we have tabled new clause 5 to that effect.

On the vital link between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, I was pleased by the announcements of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union about the common travel area, because my constituency is Ireland's gateway to the United Kingdom. The plan that we have heard so far quite rightly talks about the importance of the hard border with the north of Ireland, and it is essential, for reasons already given, that there is an agreement between the Republic and the north of Ireland. In addition, there is the porous border between Ireland and Wales, Scotland and, indeed, England through the ports, and I want clarity from the Government about what that will mean for the free movement of people, goods and capital.

I also have an interest in energy. Our internal energy market is vital for our security of supply. We have interconnectors between the Republic of Ireland, the

north of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and I want the Government to make a clear statement about the impact that that situation will have on the negotiations.

After we trigger article 50, it is imperative that we have a White Paper as soon as possible, as the Secretary of State said, because the sovereignty of this Parliament is about ensuring proper scrutiny of the Executive. I look to the Government to honour that pledge. We need amendments that will scrutinise the Government.

I have not taken my decision lightly. Two years is a long time, but it will shape the next 20 or 40 years, and the decision must be built on trust. It is imperative that every Member works to unite our communities and our countries, works with the devolved Administrations, and wins the trust of the people, so that we have a post-Brexit United Kingdom that stands proud in the world and does not ignore any part of the United Kingdom. I will support the Bill, but I will be looking for amendments in Committee and on Report before I make any further decision.

7.12 pm

**Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), particularly because his constituency is my home island, and I value his contribution. My remarks will be brief. Like most Members, I supported the idea of having a referendum. I felt that it was right for the British people to decide our future relationship with the EU. We have all heard the many contrary views about whether we should remain part of the EU, so it would have been wholly wrong for just this House to make that decision—it was right that the view of the British people was taken.

I voted to leave because the approach of the EU, as I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say a moment ago, is somewhat arrogant. Our former Prime Minister travelled the breadth of the EU trying to get a deal, and the fact that the member states did not listen was a great disappointment and shows a little arrogance, which added to the frustration felt by many British people. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) talked about the free movement of people, and he is right that the result might have been different had the EU listened to people's deep concerns about free movement and made some alterations.

I agreed with what my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) said about the campaign. I was uncomfortable with some of the campaigning by both sides—it was not necessarily our finest hour—but I have been really frustrated by some of the post-referendum comments. Some people claim that those who voted to leave did not know what they were voting for, but that shows complete arrogance and a real misunderstanding of people's concerns and frustrations. The people who have really angered me are those who say that some people who voted to leave did so out of prejudice or racism. That is frankly disgraceful. I have spent most of my time in Parliament fighting prejudice and racism, and I am not one to vote just because of them. I voted as I did because I believe that our destiny will be better if we make our own decisions. However, it is also possible to have real concerns about immigration and not be a racist. It really annoys me that some think

that if a person wants to limit the number of people coming here, they are somehow prejudiced. No, it is about being pragmatic and sensible so that our communities can cope with the numbers of people who live in our area.

When it comes to trust in politics, we have to listen to our constituents—to the people of this country. When I voted for the referendum I knew full well that the result would be what the majority of the people of the whole United Kingdom decided, so I will be representing the views of the British people. I will also represent those in my constituency who did not want us to leave by ensuring that I regularly write to the Department, and I am grateful to the Department for its answers.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks, as others have, about the verdict of the British people, but the citizens of this community are fractured, with the majority of people in Scotland wanting a different outcome. How will the Government cope with that in the negotiations?

**Stuart Andrew:** As I said, it was a vote of the whole United Kingdom. I hear a lot from SNP Members about the people who voted to remain, but I never hear them stand up for those in Scotland who voted to leave.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn talked about the referendum in Wales, in which I campaigned heavily for a no vote. I lost that campaign, but I completely respected the view of the people of Wales and accepted the result. That is what we should be doing today.

Our Prime Minister has set out an ambitious and exciting future for this country. Her 12-point plan has gone down incredibly well with many of my constituents. We are not little Englanders; we are now big Britainers. We are looking for the great opportunities that we have all over the world.

The one area about which I still have concerns is EU nationals living in this country. I appreciate what the Government are saying, and I am grateful that they have offered to protect the rights of EU nationals here, but it is incredibly important that we do that very quickly.

**Albert Owen:** A number of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues have raised that important issue. Will he therefore be supporting the helpful amendments to get clarity from the UK?

**Stuart Andrew:** I can understand the Government's point because I am stuck in the middle. My brother has just got engaged to a Polish girl who wants to stay here and, on the other hand, my father lives in Spain, and he wants to ensure that his rights are protected. I can see this from two angles. The Government have made the offer and are trying to give very clear support to EU nationals here. It is now incumbent on EU countries to do the same for British nationals living abroad.

I am optimistic about our future. We have some interesting times ahead of us, but we can be a truly global Britain. I am not harking back to the good old days, but we have an opportunity in front of us that we should grab with both hands. I will certainly be voting for the Bill tomorrow.

7.19 pm

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): I campaigned hard for Britain to remain a part of the European Union. For 10 years I was a Member of the European Parliament and I learned at first hand the worth of European co-operation to the United Kingdom. For some 12 months I was the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesman on the European Union. It is therefore true to say that I am a passionate European, but I respect and accept the result of the referendum, because we live in a democracy. Labour Members supported the referendum legislation. From a constitutional point of view, it could be argued that a referendum result is not binding, but morally it is binding on us. During the campaign, all parties clearly accepted that the result was the result and that certain actions would follow, so we are morally bound by that.

For me, the question is now not whether or not we leave the European Union, but the form of our departure and the nature of our future relationship with the EU. Article 50 is only the start of the process and, in some ways, it is far from the most important part. I wish to discuss two issues of extreme importance, which will become more important as time goes on. The first relates to my belief that it is almost inevitable that there will have to be a transitional agreement between the UK and the EU; few people seriously believe that the negotiations will be completed within two years. The nature of that agreement needs to be fully discussed. Whether Britain is part of the European economic area or there is some other arrangement, we will have to discuss the pros and cons of that agreement.

Secondly, it is important for us to focus on the so-called great repeal Bill, which will be coming to this House. In effect, it will be an act of entrenchment, taking the European *acquis communautaire* and putting it into British law. It is important that we make sure that in our devolved country those powers are not kept in Westminster where it is not appropriate to do so, but devolved out to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We must watch that carefully.

**Albert Owen:** My hon. Friend is right about that, which was why I made the point that the continuation of consultation with the devolved Governments is essential and should be put on a statutory basis.

**Wayne David:** Indeed it is important, and ideally it should be on a statutory basis, but in any case negotiation and co-operation have to take place. It is also important that we focus on ensuring that all European law that is supposed to be in that great repeal Bill is actually there. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about employment rights and environmental protection. We need to make the point that this is an ongoing process; once that piece of legislation is in place, that is not the end of the story. It will still be up to this Parliament, if it so wishes—I hope it does not—to unpick that legislation and erode this country's hard-won rights on employment protection and environmental protection in the EU.

What cannot be underestimated is that the next few years will be incredibly difficult and complicated. Nobody can seriously suggest that from now on it will be plain sailing—that is not the real world. Therefore, it is imperative that for every step of this journey there is parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary accountability. Like other Members, I am extremely concerned that the Government

[Wayne David]

have not got off to a good start. They have been dragged screaming to this Chamber, protesting that they do not want to be accountable and developing spurious arguments about having a free hand in negotiation. Who on earth can, having listened to this debate, doubt that it has been good and worthwhile for democracy? This must be only the start, not the end, of that parliamentary discussion that we need to have in our democracy.

In conclusion, we are facing difficult times ahead and it is important for our country to pull together. Nobody can doubt, irrespective of which side they were on during the referendum, that it was a difficult, acrimonious and, in some cases, bitter campaign. It is incumbent on all of us, from all political sides, to make sure that as far as possible we can create a new consensus in this country about how it can go forward together and develop a new relationship with the EU. I believe there is a will to do that among Labour Members, and I very much hope that, despite the rhetoric being employed by the Prime Minister, there is the will for that to happen among Government Members, too.

It is crucial that we do not kid ourselves that, in the modern world, Britain can somehow exist in splendid isolation. The nature of our global community means that we need co-operation, partnership and engagement with other countries. Yes, let us work around the world as well, but let us not forget that we need a new relationship with the European Union. It would be in nobody's best interests if we were to pretend that our future was somehow distinct and separate from that of the rest of the European continent.

7.25 pm

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), whom I commend for saying that we should accept and respect the result because we live in a democracy. I shall return to that important principle later in my speech. More importantly, however, he said that morally the result is binding, regardless of what legislation has said or, indeed, what has been said in this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) also made the good point that there are many complications, both personal and for the country at large, in the route ahead, so we must be careful in the steps we take along the road. Nevertheless, along that road we must travel, so I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill, which is clear, concise and consistent with the result returned by the British people in the referendum.

I welcome and respect the Supreme Court judgment that led us to this debate. Under our current constitutional settlement, if the Supreme Court decides a matter of constitutional law, it is right that we abide by that decision. That is the rule of law. That is what many people fought for in the referendum: British judges in British courts deciding British law. For that reason, I am pleased that we are here, respecting the rule of law.

I am also pleased that we are able to recognise, through the Supreme Court judgment, that this matter is a United Kingdom competence because it was a United Kingdom referendum. Yes, there were different views in various districts, counties, regions and nations

of the United Kingdom, but no single building block of the United Kingdom has a veto. We are one nation and we should respect the result of the country as a whole.

**George Kerevan:** At this point, no one is challenging the result. No one on my side is asking for a veto. We are asking, because two of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom voted a different way, whether the Government will give assurances that those nations will have a special role in the negotiations.

**Mr Jayawardena:** It seems to me that the Scottish National party not only does not like referendums—perhaps because it has lost two of them in quick succession—but is not paying any attention to the Government's extensive work in consulting and working with the devolved Administrations across these islands. I come back to the central point that we are one nation. This is a United Kingdom, and it remains a fact that the people of Scotland voted for that, much to the SNP's dismay. For that reason, I back the United Kingdom taking this decision.

On the matter of who voted for what, I want to put on record an important point that is perhaps lost in the minutiae of the various points and facts that are bandied around. Other than in Northern Ireland, we do not know how any constituency in this country voted.

**George Kerevan** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Jayawardena:** The hon. Gentleman suggests that every single result has been published, but he will know that actually it was the results for council districts that have been published. In my neck of the woods, I know that the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight voted for leave. I also know that Hart voted for remain but Basingstoke and Deane voted for leave. It is important that we recognise that as a principle, because it reaffirms my point that this is one nation and that, together as a whole, throughout the country, we voted to leave.

**Albert Owen:** I just want to correct the hon. Gentleman. Many constituencies are coterminous with their local authorities, so we absolutely know how they voted.

**Mr Jayawardena:** The hon. Gentleman makes a compelling case for boundary changes to ensure that all constituencies are of the same size. Constituencies in Wales, from where he hails, are much smaller than those in England.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** *rose—*

**Mr Jayawardena:** I shall not give way in the interests of time.

Let me be clear: we are leaving. Even the estimates that are being published by various commentators demonstrate a range of views. In my constituency, the number of people voting for leave apparently ranges from between 30-something per cent. and 50-something per cent. How can Members take as credible a position that says that as their constituency voted a certain way, they must vote to remain, regardless of the way in which the country as a whole voted? It is very important that we respect the views of the country as a whole.

Does it matter that we do not know the precise results by constituency? No. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) paraphrased Burke and set out that we are not delegates but representatives who must use our own judgment. I commend the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who said that we should be democrats. Whatever our personal views and however we think our constituencies might have voted, we must respect the views of the British people as a whole, for it is they who have taken this momentous decision. Remainers and leavers must come together. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn is right in saying that we must unite our country. I believe that it is now right that we exercise our judgment to get on with it and to secure the best deal for Britain.

7.31 pm

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena). I wish to pick up on what he said about unity in his peroration.

There are moments in our history that mark a real shift in our country's role in the world, and this Bill is one of them. Since the end of the second world war, the United Kingdom has increasingly shifted its focus in foreign policy towards Europe. That policy was followed in parallel with the gradual disengagement from our empire. It was a policy followed by the leadership of both main political parties at the time. We know that the Conservative party of Macmillan and Heath took the steps that led to the UK joining the European Community and, under Margaret Thatcher, the European single market. Dean Acheson said that Great Britain had lost an empire, but had not yet found a role.

In my political lifetime, we have seen our role as increasingly linked to the continent of Europe. This Bill marks a fundamental change in direction. For good or ill, the result of the referendum was clear: the majority of the UK wanted to leave the European Union. I voted for a referendum and I cannot see any justification for disregarding the result, despite the fact that I campaigned hard for us to remain in the European Union.

The Bill before us initiates the process of leaving the EU and, it seems, turning away from Europe. It is difficult to see how, at this point, the other members of the EU can see it otherwise. The question that then arises is this: what is our role going forward? It is really important that we consider that this evening. The Prime Minister has talked about the opportunities in the world, and there are indeed many. I attended an export forum in my own constituency yesterday and heard what exporting companies in Wrexham were doing.

What concerns me about the many representations that I have received is that they focus very little on the future, and more on the acrimony of the debate. What we need to do now is to accept the result. The speech from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) was extremely important, because it showed that the Labour party accepts the result of the referendum. I ask the Government Front-Bench team to take that into account in their future dealings with our party and with us as individuals. Much of the rhetoric that we have heard so far has focused on division. The Conservative party and the

Government now need to reach out to the Labour party to try to get the best deal for our country when Britain leaves the European Union.

We have many advantages as a nation: our language, universities, innovation and culture. We must preserve those precious assets, but we also need to build a new, positive relationship with our European allies, albeit outside the European Union. Many of our best businesses, such as Airbus in my constituency in north Wales, have become successes within the EU because of their close relationship with other countries. We need to signal that we do not intend to deregulate in areas such as environmental standards, which have actually driven innovation in our automotive sector, for example, and built the success of our automotive industries.

There is a real concern among many of our constituents that the Government do not believe in labour standards for our people. The Government need to reach out and make it clear that they do and that they do not intend to use leaving the EU as a way of reducing the rights of the people of this country. If the Conservative party signalled that, the Labour party would show a far greater acceptance of the referendum result than we have shown today.

I know that this is difficult for many of my dear colleagues, but I am talking about the Labour party—the party I love—and its future here. We need to accept that Brexit is going to happen and work to forge the best possible way forward for our Labour party and the people we represent in the post-Brexit world. Please, let us put behind us the division—both in the Labour party and more broadly in the country. Let us reach out more and strive for more unity. We have to deal with the post-Brexit world. We cannot simply use the rest of the world as a market as we did when we became the first industrial nation. It is a more competitive world, with nations such as China and India stronger now than ever before. If we want to achieve, we have to work together.

7.37 pm

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I voted to remain, and the decision was difficult for me. I did so not out of love for the European Union but because at that particular time I thought it the best way to use my personal vote. At the time, however, I could have also constructed an argument to leave.

I want to back up what my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) was saying earlier about constituencies. In Medway, 64.1% voted to leave and 35% voted to remain. That particular result was made up of two and a half constituencies, so my hon. Friend was absolutely right in saying that we do not have constituency results; I do not have a particular result for Rochester and Strood. However, because of the result in Medway, I will vote to trigger article 50 and support the Government.

Sadly, the campaign was full of false statements and claims. It will always depress me that from some quarters there was a real lack of respect for different views. However, I must point out that I have never thought that people did not know what they voted for and that they did not realise that leaving the European Union would mean leaving the single market or the customs union. I am one of my constituents, and I fully understood that the two things are entwined. I would like those who disagree to point out exactly what they

[Kelly Tolhurst]

thought people were voting for if not to leave the single market, bearing in mind that the single market has three principles.

**Alex Salmond:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** May I carry on?

Those three principles are payments, freedom of movement and regulation, which were all addressed by the leave campaign before the referendum. I am fed up with those who argue that we must agree with all the negotiations and that we must vote on the final deal. The final deal will be what it will be. After negotiations with member states, this Government will make a deal with the best interests and prosperity of the British people at its heart in order to achieve the will of the majority of people in the United Kingdom. Yes, there is uncertainty, but there would have been uncertainty even if we had voted to remain. This debate is a distraction. We must get on with the process so we can get the certainty we need. We are debating a process.

My constituents voted to leave for a number of reasons and, despite what has been said, immigration was a major factor across Medway, Kent and the south of England. Many of my constituents were fed up with being patronised by the European Union's finger-wagging at the UK. Leaving the EU is an opportunity that we need to embrace. This is a time to get real about immigration, trade, industry and our economy, and to use our sovereign power to dictate the path without having the EU to blame for future difficulties. The sooner we trigger article 50, the sooner we can take a long, hard look at the way in which we do things in the UK, particularly at our love of over-regulating, which has hindered our progress and restricted our potential in some areas.

I voted to remain, and I will be representing my constituents in the House of Commons to ensure that all future UK legislative decisions taken here benefit the people of Rochester and Strood, and others, no matter whether they voted to remain or to leave.

7.42 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): Many hon. Members have long believed that the United Kingdom's interests would be best served outside the European Union. They campaigned passionately for what they believed in, and their view is that we must now leave the European Union. The Prime Minister says that she wants to deliver a Brexit that works for all and that unites our divided country. I, too, want to bring the country back together. Members right across the House will have experienced just how divided the country became in the months leading up to last June and how divided it has become since, but we cannot bring the country back together if we pretend that it has spoken with one united voice.

People who voted to leave did so for all sorts of reasons, many of which have absolutely nothing to do with the European Union, so when the Prime Minister speaks of the will of the people, her interpretation is frankly no clearer or more precise than anyone else's. Let us not pretend that the people have spoken, because not all of them have. In fact, only 27% of people of the country voted to leave. Some 13 million did not vote,

another 7 million eligible voters were not registered and 1 million British ex-pats were not allowed to vote. Even though the futures of 16-year-olds were on the ballot paper, they were denied a say. Only two of the four nations that make up the United Kingdom voted to leave, and there was no quadruple lock. There was no two-thirds supermajority, which is common in all other countries making major constitutional change. Even so, we are told that the people have spoken.

Look at what we have been allowed to become. In a matter of months, our public discourse has been consumed by vitriol and abuse. Hate crimes rose by 40% in the aftermath of the referendum, and we do not yet know what forces will be unleashed on our departure.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Like a number of colleagues including, I am sure, my right hon. Friend, I have been subject to the most orchestrated abuse that I have seen in the past 16 years in this House. Does he agree that there is a danger that the debate is corrupted by a small minority who feel that they are the masters now and that, therefore, any dissent is unacceptable?

**Mr Lammy:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is easy to dismiss views with which you disagree if you never listen to them and just dismiss the people who hold them as villains or enemies of the people.

Yet it is on these terms that we are being asked to rubber-stamp a blank cheque for the Government to deliver the most extreme version of Brexit imaginable. We are being asked to ignore the fact that leaving the European Union will saddle us with a £60 billion divorce bill. We are not going to get tariff-free access to EU customers while rejecting free movement; that is not on the table. We are not going to get a more favourable trading agreement with Europe from outside the single market; that is a paradox. We are not going to come to a full agreement with Europe within two years; believing otherwise completely flies in the face of precedent and all evidence.

Exiting without a deal and falling back on the World Trade Organisation rules is being talked about as though that is a good option. That is totally wrong—it would be an absolute disaster for this country. Even on the optimistic assumption that we can sign trade agreements all over the world, this does not even come close to making up for the loss of the single market. We are facing a return to a hard border in Northern Ireland and a breakdown of the Union with Scotland. We are not reclaiming sovereignty, another promise that falls apart under any scrutiny: we are transferring it to a negotiation behind closed doors.

Doctors are against it, scientists are against it, the financial services sector is against it, and manufacturers are against it because of their exports, but these people are dismissed—and why? Because these days we do not listen to experts. Yes, we are leaving, but it is the EU nations that decide how we leave and what we end up with. Where will this end in 2019? We do not know. Outside the single market, for sure, and outside the customs union, with no trade deal with Europe or anywhere else, our only friend President Trump—a man who has demonstrated why we should worry greatly about a free trade agreement that will probably lead to Kaiser Permanente running the NHS.

We should not fool ourselves. This is not, and never has been, a debate about the economy; it has always been about immigration. We are staring down the barrel of a hard Brexit because immigration has been prioritised over everything else: the economy, jobs, and living standards.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the whole debate on immigration has been completely dishonest in that it has failed to recognise that like all developed, ageing economies, we are going to need migration in order to thrive in the future? We could stop more than half of the net immigration into this country tomorrow, because it is from outside the EU.

**Mr Lammy:** Absolutely.

We were told during the campaign that we could cut immigration without hitting our economy. We were sold the lie that immigrants come here and take more than they contribute. Between 1995 and 2011, European immigrants made a net contribution of £4.4 billion to our public services. In the same period, our native population cost us £591 billion. Our economy cannot exist without people coming here to do the jobs that people in the country either do not want or do not have the skills to do.

It is almost half a century since a Member of this House, in a very different era, made these same warnings of

“wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth...children unable to obtain school places”

and

“homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition”.

How far we have fallen when a black British Member of Parliament, of African and Caribbean descent, has to stand here quoting Enoch Powell. It is the easy option to blame migrants who come here with skills instead of successive Governments, both Conservative and Labour, who have failed: failed to educate our own to compete, failed to build affordable housing, failed to fund our public services, and failed to ensure that growth is felt outside of London and the south-east. A hard Brexit will not deal with any of the long-standing structural problems highlighted by the Brexit vote—it will make them worse. The real tragedy is that Whitehall and Parliament, so consumed with Brexit for the next decade, will have no capacity to deal with these hard-pressing issues.

There are Conservative Members who have been dreaming of a low-tax, low-wage, low-regulation offshore tax haven for decades, and now they have it in their grasp, they salivate at the thought of us becoming the new Singapore. I am not going to stand with them. If we let the Prime Minister pursue this reckless course—this Brexit at any cost—we know who will suffer. It will be the poorest, many of whom are in my constituency. The referendum was not just about votes from the north; 52% of leave voters lived in the south of England, 59% were middle class and 58% voted Conservative in 2015. I remind my colleagues who are worried about this, and who are thinking of voting with the Government, of those things.

Let me finish by asking one simple question, which was once asked by one of our most celebrated parliamentarians:

“Is it prudent? Is it possible, however we might desire it, to turn our backs upon Europe?”

When Churchill spoke those words, he was talking about appeasement, and he was going very much against the prevailing wind. The same is true today. Patriotism requires more than just blind faith. We must remember our history, our values, what we represent and what we stand for. Most of all, we must remember what we stand against. For all those reasons, and for the sake of this country that I love, I will be voting against triggering article 50.

7.50 pm

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). He knows that I like him very much, but I disagree with what he has said. I commend the shadow Brexit Secretary for his powerful speech, in which he demonstrated that he believes in our democracy and in the national interest.

The simplicity of the Bill speaks volumes about what it will put into law. As has been said so eloquently by the Secretary of State and many right hon. and hon. Friends and Members, the Bill is about giving our Prime Minister the power to implement what a majority of the British people voted for on 23 June. Members from all parts of the House have made valid and interesting points about aspects of our negotiations and what they would like our final exiting deal to look like, but that is simply not what the Bill is about. Such points, however valid and well made, lead to confusion over the issue at stake: do we leave the EU or do we not? Luckily, that decision has already been made for us. It was made for us because we in this place voted for that most crucial of decisions to be taken out of our own hands and put into the hands of the British people.

I recognise fully that the referendum result was close. The result local to my constituency was even closer than the national result, with 48.4% of Stratford-on-Avon voting to remain and 51.6% voting to leave. That means that I am acutely aware of the need to balance the democratic result of the referendum with a great deal of respect for those who voted to remain. For that reason, along with the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and Daniel Hannan MEP, I welcomed British Future’s “Brexit Together” manifesto. The aim of the manifesto is to voice support for an exit from the EU that is acceptable to both leave and remain voters. It presents key recommendations on issues that were fundamental in the referendum campaign, such as immigration, security and sovereignty. As I have said, however, now is not the time to discuss and debate those issues. Now is the time to vote to allow our Prime Minister to begin the process of leaving the EU, to allow her to undertake the complex negotiations on the important decisions and to deliver a Brexit that works for everyone.

It is important to bear in mind that the Bill is completely different from the series of votes held to ratify the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties. In those cases, Parliament knew exactly what the terms were and was therefore able to debate the substance fully. In the case of this Bill, we are voting on whether to allow our Prime Minister to undertake negotiations for an outcome that is not yet certain. In order to obtain the best deal possible for the United Kingdom, it is vital that she has as much room for manoeuvre as possible as she embarks on this complex process. Of course we want to see a

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

White Paper, and her 12-point plan and priorities were very clear, but we do not want to micromanage the negotiations. In my view, any amendments to the Bill that tied her hands or forced her to hold only one negotiating position on any issue would damage her ability to obtain the best possible deal for this country and would harm the national interest. She must have the ability to engage with EU interlocutors freely, not have her position compromised by constraints placed on her by this House. I know there are those in this place who want to put such constraints on her. They want to amend or delay this very simple piece of legislation either to suit their own party's interests, or because they do not like the decision made in the referendum.

**Alex Salmond:** If it was so blindingly obvious that leaving the European Union meant leaving the single market, as many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues have claimed, why did the Prime Minister take six months to say so, scolding many of her colleagues when they ventured such an opinion?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The right hon. Gentleman will recall that both the previous Prime Minister and the previous Chancellor made it very clear, as did many of the commentators in many of the debates that took place during the referendum campaign, that if we are to leave the European Union, we will leave the single market.

My fear is that if Members of this House are seen to be hindering so fundamental a piece of legislation, which simply puts in motion what has already been decided by a majority of the British people, it will only enhance negative perceptions of politicians as arrogant individuals who think they know what is best for the people of this country, even though we politicians voted to give the people their say.

Last night, this House unanimously condemned President Trump's Executive order banning Syrian refugees and restricting travel to the USA from seven predominantly Muslim countries, labelling the order "discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive". It was perhaps the proudest I have been of this House since I first came here in 2010. I would be delighted if the House were to give the same backing to this Bill's Second Reading. We would send a clear message to those who voted to put us here that we listen to them when we vote to give them a direct voice on an issue of critical importance, and that we act to implement such a measure. Let us be democrats, and vote in favour of the Bill.

7.57 pm

**Mr Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): In my view, it is a tragedy that we have seen introduced into the House a Bill that will result in our withdrawal from the European Union at the same time as our Government are seeking to embrace an extreme right-wing United States President and Administration who seem hellbent on disrupting a long-standing progressive and multilateral world order based on trade, NATO and the European Union. The American President, whose slogan is "America first", and who talks in protectionist terms and about a possible trade war with China, hardly seems likely to provide the UK with favourable trade terms, given that the UK has relinquished any leverage it might have had by unilaterally announcing that it is to leave the

EU single market. What is on offer from the United States to replace the high-quality consumer standards that EU membership has given us? The answer is chlorinated chicken, beef injected with growth hormones and genetically modified products that do not comply with the EU's strict precautionary principles.

We have to deal with the world as it is now—the US will not hold elections again until 2020, and the prospects of a second referendum are indeed remote—so I will reluctantly support the triggering of article 50, at least to show what I regard as a modicum of respect for the referendum result, in spite of the fact that the margin was a narrow 52% to 48% and that the debate was littered with untruths and misleading facts, while the largely EU-hostile media represented the interests of their owners.

Let me make this point very clear: the vote is not a blank cheque. If the deal that comes back is bad, I and I am sure many other people will vote against it. If there is no deal and we become dependent on deals struck with the US, Turkey and New Zealand, then God help this country. We risk being isolated in Europe. Why should we buy lamb or butter from New Zealand when we can buy them from France or produce them ourselves? How can we get Turkey to comply with EU consumer standards when they are nowhere near ready to enter the EU—if, indeed, they ever do so? I genuinely hope the Government can maximise their influence to get a good trade deal. The future of this country, and its jobs and prosperity, very much depends on it.

The Foreign Secretary yesterday accused Members of demonising Donald Trump as a Nazi, when a week ago he himself compared President Hollande with a Nazi guard giving punishment beatings. The incompetence and undiplomatic nature of the Foreign Secretary, and other members of the Government, lead me to believe that it is very unlikely we will get a good deal with our European partners. That is not just because of what has been said in recent weeks and months, but because of the history of Eurosceptic Conservative Back Benchers. The Government's track record is poor. For the sake of this country, our young people and everyone else, let us hope their negotiating skills are far better.

8 pm

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Even today, some seven months on from the referendum, I still view with disbelief and inspiration the enormity of what happened on 23 June. Between 1 am and 4 am on that momentous Friday morning, my whole world view changed: the way I saw my country and my constituency, which voted to leave, was forever altered. Another political event so vast and so improbable is hard to find. The British people's vote—polite, calm and astonishing—was a vote to ignore the advice of their political leaders, to defy the main parties, and to reject the megabanks and the multinationals. It was a vote that turned down the advice of the CBI, the TUC, the National Farmers Union, the broadcasters, the institutions, the experts and Barack Obama. It was against all odds.

Why did they do that? The British people wanted to re-empower themselves. They were fed up with a dirigiste EU imposing laws, policies, restrictions and costs upon them in an increasingly unaccountable, inefficient and costly way. They wanted to be free of a political union responsible for a failing single currency and rising youth unemployment.

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

**Suella Fernandes:** No, I won't. The British people voted —[*Interruption.*]

**Wayne David:** I thank the hon. Lady for eventually giving way. Would she ascribe any part of the defeat of the remain campaign to the incompetency of her former Prime Minister?

**Suella Fernandes:** That is very childish and immature. I salute the former Prime Minister for having the courage to put the vote to the British people and respect the outcome with honour. The hon. Gentleman should, too.

In voting to leave, the British people were asserting their self-confidence and their fearlessness. They wanted Britain to forge a different path, one of a global-minded, pluralist, competitive and liberal Britain. That is why it is important that this House and the other place ensure that that happens. The procedure for withdrawal, set out in article 50, is the right to way to proceed for two reasons. First, it provides a time limit. The two-year deadline prevents the talks being strung out indefinitely, and provides clarity and reassurance. Secondly, article 50 enshrines the ratification of withdrawal through qualified majority voting, rather than by unanimity. This ensures a greater chance of ratification for the terms of our departure.

Members proposing to vote against the Bill should be mindful of the fact that the House has already voted on and agreed to the Government's timetable for triggering article 50 by 31 March by a significant margin of 372. We must respect the decision not just of this House but of the British people. Opposition Members who in their intransigence wish to defy the previous vote seek only to prolong and frustrate this process in an illogical and irresponsible way.

More than simply triggering article 50 and leaving the EU in the technical sense of resuming our sovereignty, we should use the Brexit process to address the concerns that pushed people into voting leave in the first place. We need to stand up for the needs of those on lower incomes by reducing the cost of living, we need more democratisation and decentralisation and we need to embrace the unprecedented opportunity of free trade. As Richard Cobden, the 19th century MP said:

"Free Trade is God's diplomacy and there is no other certain way of uniting people in the bonds of peace."

He was right. There is no greater barometer of peace than the opening up of an economy.

This is an opportunity that Britain must grasp. We need to think like a global and maritime nation, rather than a continental nation, and as the Prime Minister has stated so clearly, we can only do this by leaving the customs union and the common external tariff and by liberating ourselves from the common commercial policy. We need skilled workers, yes, but we need them from the world outside the EU, not just from within. Crucially, however, we want to determine for ourselves who comes in and in what numbers. We stand on the brink of prosperity, freedom and opportunity as we vote to trigger article 50. That is the prize for our courage as we write the next chapter of our country's great future.

8.6 pm

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I am strongly in favour of the reasoned amendments and against the Second Reading of this grudging, threadbare Bill, which will have such profound and damaging consequences for our country. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who again today proved himself to be a true statesman, I did not vote for the legislation paving the way for the referendum, so I am being entirely consistent in my opposition. I did not vote for the referendum because I thought it a reckless gamble with our country's future by David Cameron—and so it also proved for his future.

In Stoke-on-Trent, next door to my constituency, 70% voted to leave and 30% to remain. In Newcastle-under-Lyme, after a very hard campaign, it was 60% and 40%. As this fraught, long process goes on, I have not given up on persuading another 10%, at least, in my constituency. In opposing the Bill, I am not disrespecting the opinion of the majority; I just think, on this occasion, that it is wrong. I am not failing to trust the people; I just disagree with some of them and agree with the 48% who voted to remain. What I do not trust, however, on the basis of their performance so far, is this Government or their ability to achieve the best for our country if we hand them this blank cheque of a Bill with no safeguards.

We need assurances on many areas, including on tariff-free access to the single market for our goods and services—for the ceramics industry, a major exporter in my area of the Potteries, for instance; on continued membership of the customs union, which not only aids trade in Europe but, importantly, helps to diminish non-tariff barriers to trade; on assurances on visa-free movement to and from the European continent, which we have got used to and which is so important to our people, businesses and the economy as a whole; and on guarantees that the rights of EU nationals living here and of UK nationals on the continent will be protected, not just with permanent leave to remain but with full democratic rights, so that we do not create a second class of *Gastarbeiter* among our populations. These are fundamental issues that the Government need to address further before being given the green light to trigger article 50.

I and other colleagues will no doubt be the target again of orchestrated abuse, as we have been since the vote in December, for being so impertinent as to even raise these issues. However, I think we can be given a bit of slack for our questioning in the mere seven months since the referendum, when my next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), spent 40 years defying the so-called will of the people following the overwhelming vote to remain, by two thirds to a third, in the 1970s.

Let me draw to a close by mentioning a further safeguard that such a Bill needs: the guarantee of a meaningful vote on the terms that the Government negotiate before we exit the European Union. After her trip to the White House, I see that the Prime Minister was in Turkey at the weekend. There was a very effective piece of political advertising during the referendum that entirely changed the terms and the tone of the conversations that we were having in Newcastle-under-Lyme and around the country in the last few weeks of the campaign. That was the big, red banner poster that went up saying, "Turkey (population 76 million) is

[Paul Farrelly]

joining the EU—Vote Leave”. It was not, of course, and it is not. That was a lie, but the only question that we were asked from then on was, “What are you going to do about the Turks?” It was simply impossible to convince people during the referendum that it was indeed a lie.

**Alex Salmond:** I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman recalls that it was actually the Foreign Secretary, who was campaigning hard for Turkish accession to the European Union, who then, as part of the leave campaign, used that mythical accession as a reason for the UK exiting the European Union.

**Paul Farrelly:** I remember it very well. It was an abysmal and terrible performance from someone who considers himself one of the leading statesmen of our time and, indeed, an aspirant Prime Minister.

The peddling of myths and falsehoods during the referendum is a very good reason why there should be a second, meaningful vote on the terms of departure—a vote on the facts and not the fictions. Quite frankly, this House and the country deserve better than the type of vote that has been promised so far by the Prime Minister, which is, “My way or the highway”. That is simply not good enough.

When I was growing up, in my late teens and early 20s, I used to organise international youth exchanges. Every summer, teenagers from all parts of Europe gathered to tend war graves in Berlin, where the wounds of conflict were still fresh and the cold war divided the city by a wall. I did that because in Staffordshire, at Cannock Chase by the Commonwealth war memorial, we have the German war graves. I have worked closely with the German War Graves Commission over many years. For me personally, co-operating with Europe is about much more than simple prosperity. I would simply not be doing the right thing by my conscience, nor would it be in the interests of the country or what I believe to be the interests of the people I represent, if I voted for this flimsy Bill. I do not support leaving the European Union and I think this Bill is too blank a cheque for this Government.

8.12 pm

**David Mackintosh** (Northampton South) (Con): There is perhaps no other subject that will dominate this Parliament and define the future path for our country than leaving the European Union. I fully supported the idea of holding a referendum on British membership of the European Union. It was a clear manifesto commitment at the 2015 election and this is an issue that has dominated British politics since before I was born. I strongly believed that the time had come to allow a referendum, so that the British people could make a decision once and for all on whether we should be members of the European Union or not.

I clearly recognised that a referendum is a binary choice—a yes or no; to stay or leave; membership or no membership. I weighed up the benefits as I saw them. I recognised strong arguments on both sides, but I always believed that the results should be followed. I voted to remain in the European Union, but my town of Northampton voted overwhelmingly to leave, by 58.3%. Whatever my own views, I am now mandated by my constituents to vote how they tell me. I am their

representative here and as such will carry out my duty to them by supporting the decision to allow the Prime Minister to trigger article 50. I believe that this is not the time for further division. The days of remain or Brexit are over. It is clear that we are leaving the European Union and it is crucial that in the months and years ahead we work together to get the best deal we can for this country and focus on an international, global outlook. That is where my efforts will be.

8.14 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am pleased to speak today on behalf of my Brighton constituents and indeed of anyone else who continues to be desperately concerned about the enormous risks to this country from the Government’s approach to Brexit. To my mind, the bottom line is this: the Prime Minister has no mandate for the extreme Brexit she is pursuing. It was not on the ballot paper, and I see no contradiction between respecting the outcome of the referendum, which I do—we are leaving—and withholding consent to trigger article 50 tomorrow, when the kind of Brexit that has been set out is so profoundly damaging to the people of this country, and when it is being pursued in profoundly undemocratic ways: with the absence of a White Paper, an absence of safeguards for our economy and with no guarantees for our key social and environmental priorities, either.

I have to say that it is a little surreal to hear so many hon. Members acknowledge that extreme Brexit will be a disaster, yet then announce that they are going to go ahead and vote for it anyway. Very cleverly, the Government have managed to morph a narrow vote in favour of leaving the EU into an apparently overwhelming mandate to leave the world’s biggest trading zone and be cut off from the EU and its agencies. The Government seem increasingly desperate to make deals with any despot they can find—we saw an arms deal with Turkey last weekend, and a trade deal with a divisive and dangerous US President to whom the Prime Minister has already clearly demonstrated she is entirely either unable or unwilling to stand up. That is not what the people voted for.

Nobody voted in the referendum to scrap environmental protection, consumer standards or workers’ rights. Nobody voted to undermine the rights of UK citizens living in other EU countries, or indeed EU citizens living here in the UK. Nobody voted for future generations of young people being denied the right to travel, work and study at a level at least equal to what they enjoy now. And nobody voted for the UK to become a tax haven floating off the coasts of Europe, clinging on to the coat tails of Trump’s America. Yet triggering article 50 under the terms set out will set us on a course that will cause all those things to happen, because they are the logical consequence of the Prime Minister’s extreme version of Brexit.

The Prime Minister’s agenda is essentially about sacrificing the many benefits of the single market on the altar of ending free movement. It may be unpopular to say so, but it needs to be said that free movement has benefited our country in numerous ways. It has benefited British people by giving them the opportunity to work, to study, to live and to love in 27 other countries. It benefits our public services, especially the NHS, and it benefits our economy as a whole because EU nationals

contribute more to our public finances than they take out. We would be a poorer country without the taxes EU nationals pay and the work they do in our hospitals, our care homes and our councils—and, more importantly, our societies and our communities would be immeasurably the poorer as well.

The Prime Minister's agenda will also see us abandon the customs union, and it threatens a new economic model defined by a race to the bottom on corporate taxation—a model that, despite the Prime Minister's pledge to unite the country, will likely see inequality in Britain rise, as spending on vital public services such as the NHS is eroded yet further. Again, nobody voted for that on 23 June, either. On the contrary, many voted for more money to be invested in the NHS. I seem to recall £350 million a week—yet, just last week, Ministers released official figures showing that they will be cutting the NHS budget per head in real terms in 2018-19.

Let us challenge this idea that these other trade agreements are somehow going to make up for the difference if we leave the single market. Research has shown quite clearly that even if we manage to do deals with the US, the EU, China, Russia, Canada and New Zealand, they would not anywhere near compensate for the loss to the economy of withdrawing from the single market. For voters who support leaving the EU only if they are not personally worse off, that, I think, is crucial information.

The Government have been forced grudgingly to allow Parliament a say on triggering article 50, but it is massively insulting to squeeze this resentful scrap of a Bill into a timeframe that is entirely disproportionate to the immensity of its consequences—and doubly so when the Bill throws us off a cliff edge.

**Mr Baker:** I am just enjoying a blog post on a website of 13 July 2015, in which the hon. Lady comments on the Greek situation under the hashtag “ThisIsACoup”. She describes the IMF, the eurozone and the European Central Bank as “the forces of darkness”. She finishes her post by writing:

“It's time that politicians here in Britain, no matter where they stand on the economics of the Greek situation, take a stand for the simple right of a nation to manage its own affairs.”

Does she still believe what she wrote back then?

**Caroline Lucas:** I do not see any contradiction between what I wrote back then and the position I am taking now. I have always been critical of certain actions of the ECB and I will continue to be so. That does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Only someone who was enormously reckless would think that was a sensible way forward.

What is reckless is a Bill that is going to throw us off a cliff edge, entirely unnecessarily, because it fails to include any mention, let alone give any details, of any transitional arrangements. That means that once the clock starts ticking—once article 50 has been triggered—if negotiations take longer than those two years, we will suddenly be thrown into a world of WTO-only tariffs, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that his constituents will not thank him for that. I do not believe that democracy is well served by such recklessness.

In the last few moments available to me, I want to say a few words about the environment, an issue that has been conspicuous by its absence during most of the

debate over the past few days. I am especially concerned about the need for guarantees—real guarantees—to maintain environmental regulation that is at least as strong as current EU regulation. An environmental protection Act—crucially, with its own court of arbitration—might be one way of delivering that, but we also need to ensure that there are clear ways of retaining our relationships with important European agreements such as REACH, on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals, and with the European Chemicals Agency.

We need UK environmental regulators and enforcement agencies, ready to step into the shoes of the EU institutions that currently perform such roles. Those institutions must be properly funded when the EU is no longer funding them. We need to ensure that the principles that underpin our environmental regulations, such as the precautionary principle, are not lost. At present we have no guarantees, and we deserve to have guarantees before article 50 is triggered. About this, as about so much else, there is no information.

Leaders of the leave campaign famously talk about taking back control. If that means anything, it surely means that control must be not just about our departure, but about our destination. Democracy requires that Parliament has ample opportunity to scrutinise the terms of the Brexit deal that will emerge from negotiations, but it also requires the country to have the right to continue to be given a say in the form of a referendum on the proposed deal. I cannot vote for a Bill that fails to provide those safeguards.

8.21 pm

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** It is a great honour to take part in this historic debate, and a particular honour to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who speaks about the issue with such passion. As I am sure all Members will agree, we have heard some extraordinary speeches today. I pay particular tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). That masterclass display of oratory and expertise has, perhaps, shown us in the House two ends of a debate that has been taking place in the country for some 40 years.

I, of course, have a slightly different viewpoint, because I was not a Member of Parliament when the European Union Referendum Act 2015 was passed. This is not, for me, a review of past battles lost and won. It is about looking to the future, and it is in that spirit that I shall address the House this evening—briefly, of course.

The Bill is intended to give the Government the power that they need in order to begin negotiations. It is a legal mechanism to enact what the British people decided in the referendum. It is not about the detail of the negotiation, and it is not about the kind of country, or the domestic law, that we shall have post-Brexit. That will come later, with the great repeal Bill. Parliament will debate those matters, but the place for them is not in this Bill.

The referendum that we experienced so clearly and vividly last year was an extraordinary event for the country. In 388 of 650 constituencies, more people voted to leave than voted for the sitting Members of Parliament. The Conservative Party manifesto, on which an overall majority was won, promised that the Government would respect the result of the referendum, “whatever

[Robert Courts]

the outcome". Parliament voted overwhelmingly, by six to one, to give the people a say. The Government made the position plain, in debate and during the campaign. It told the people, "This is your decision, and the Government will implement what you decide." The result of the referendum was clear: 17.4 million people voted to leave.

I, of course, was outside this House at the time, and I have a different perspective, but what was clear to me then was that, whatever the result, there was no question that the Government would not implement what the people decided. The Supreme Court has made it clear that its decision had nothing to do with whether or not this country should leave the EU, nor does it have anything to do with the timetable or any future arrangements with the European Union. Those who oppose this Bill know full well that the time to debate that detail will come; they seek simply to tie the Government's hands at this stage, in the hope, I regret to say, that a series of impossible demands will render any good deal impossible. We must be sure not to be drawn into a debate that is an exercise in delay and obfuscation, when the time to debate that detail will come.

I do not pretend that the process of withdrawing from the European Union will be easy, straightforward or brief. It will require significant expertise and a consistent approach, but, with this Government, we have exactly that: expertise and a consistent approach. I am sure that all Members will listen to their constituents, as is incumbent upon all of us, and that is why I spend time in my constituency talking to businesses, charities and the public sector in order to understand how the process of our establishing our new role in the world impacts upon them.

There are challenges, certainly, but there are also opportunities, and we must look to the future with that positive attitude. Nothing is more likely to end up with this country having a bad deal than if we approach the negotiations divided, weak, failing to get behind the Government and make this a success, or seeking to tie the Government's hands in negotiation.

We have enormous advantages as a country—the world's sixth biggest military and fifth biggest economy, the world's most used language, and the Commonwealth, but, above all, a country of people who are clever, inventive and industrious.

It is a time to look to accept that the referendum result has been decided. The British people would never forgive us if, having given them the choice, we decided that we had, in fact, changed our mind, or we could not get together and make a success of it. We must look to the future, embrace the positives and trust the people, and that process must start now.

8.27 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): When I was first elected to this House seven years ago, I knew this job would be hard. I anticipated the soul-searching that would accompany, for example, a decision to commit troops to military action, but what I did not anticipate seven years ago were the fundamental questions about our democracy that I have been asking myself since the referendum last year.

We might talk today about the will of the people, the process which has led us here and the process which follows, but ultimately this debate is about how we take decisions in the best interests of our country and how we respect the diverse views of our electorate. I will vote against triggering article 50 tomorrow evening, and I will be called a democracy-denier. "How can you ignore the will of the people?", some will cry; "You voted for a referendum. How many times do you want to rerun it?" Democracy did not start or end on 23 June; it is a process, not an event, and I see it as my responsibility to say it as I see it.

There were circumstances in which I would have voted to trigger article 50. The Prime Minister killed off that prospect for me when she made her speech in Lancaster House: a speech in which she said she would pull us out of the single market; a speech in which she put her desire to reduce immigration above our country's economic interest; and a speech in which she threatened the countries closest to us with a trade war if she did not get her way. I was ashamed by the words of the British Prime Minister that day, and I resolved then to vote against the triggering of article 50. How we negotiate with our European neighbours is as important as what we seek to achieve. I disagree with the Prime Minister on her priorities and I disagree with the manner in which she is setting about achieving them.

This is the start of a process that we might not be able to reverse. The Government want to take us out of the single market.

**Mr Lammy:** Did my hon. Friend see some of the headlines in the European papers following that speech, and does she agree that those reactions will make the negotiations much harder in the coming months?

**Heidi Alexander:** I did see some of that commentary. One of the Spanish newspapers described the speech as a mixture of delusion and outdated nationalism.

I can predict the future no better than anyone else in this Chamber, but my instincts tell me that coming out of the single market will do us harm for many years to come. Last June, the British people were asked whether they wished to leave the European Union. They were not asked whether they wanted to leave the single market or the European economic area—those are different things—and the words "customs union" were barely uttered in the run-up to the referendum. Instead, we had a toxic and misleading debate that inflamed rather than informed.

Some people might say, "Get over it," but I cannot. We had a Conservative manifesto that promised to safeguard British interests in the single market. We had a leave campaigner on the airwaves telling us:

"Only a madman would actually leave the market".

Even that man of the people, the ex-public school educated ex-stockbroker Nigel Farage, pointed out how countries such as Norway—outside the EU but inside the European economic area—"do pretty well". And then what happened? A Prime Minister who was crowned her party's leader without a single vote having to be cast sits in No. 10 and determines what leaving the EU looks like. That might be democracy to some but it is not democracy to me. Parliament or the British people should determine whether we leave the single market. Article 127 of the EEA agreement states that a party to

the agreement must notify its intention to leave 12 months in advance. There is a key democratic imperative for more people than just the Prime Minister to have a say.

Some colleagues here today will vote to trigger article 50 when in their heart of hearts they are deeply fearful of the economic and social repercussions for our country. They will do so for good reasons, including the need to reflect in their own minds the broad wish of a majority of those who voted in the referendum. I cannot do that, because as the reality of Brexit Britain emerges over the next few years, I want to have acted in line with my conscience. I fear for our economy. I fear for the livelihoods and living standards of my constituents. I also worry for jobs in Swindon, the town where I grew up and a place with a big Honda plant whose supply chain spans Europe. Yes, we might make some gains as a result of new trade deals elsewhere, but what of the losses we incur from coming out of the single market?

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab):** My hon. Friend mentions the impact on the car manufacturing sector. If we had to operate under WTO rules, an additional 10% tariff would be placed on car exports. What impact would that have on her community?

**Heidi Alexander:** The impact would be felt across the country. The ease with which British firms trade with other firms in Europe is absolutely integral to the strength of our economy.

I also worry that immigration controls might result in a bureaucratic system whereby we cut off our nose to spite our face. I worry about the business of government being dominated by efforts to disentangle us from the EU, with endless hours being spent recreating systems that, by and large, currently work quite well. And what of the things that the Government will not be able to do as a result of Brexit? There is an urgent need to find an answer on how we fund our NHS and social care system, how we upskill our population and how we rebalance the economy to ensure that no town or community is left behind. We can kiss goodbye to those things as Brexit will suck the oxygen from Whitehall and Westminster.

I am not normally a pessimist, but I feel I am watching a slow-motion car crash and I have to do something about it. Over the next 12 months, Europe is likely to experience the political turmoil that we, along with America, have experienced over the past 12 months. Now is not the time to be making threats and burning bridges. Now is not the time for party politics. My country comes first and that is why I will vote against this Bill at the first opportunity.

8.35 pm

**Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con):** I rise to support the Bill, respect the referendum and trigger article 50, so that we can forge a new path for our country as a confident, self-governing democracy, a good European neighbour and a global leader in free trade.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander). I am more optimistic about the outcome, but I pay tribute to her for the concerns she expressed, and I pay tribute to contributions from Members on both sides of the House and both sides of the debate. The truth is that the Bill puts all of us to the test. Some do not like the outcome of the referendum,

and I can understand that. Some think the judges interfered in a matter we asked the people to decide, and I can understand that, too. However, we cannot reinvent the basic tenets of democracy, from referendums to the rule of law, whenever it produces a result we do not much care for.

Likewise, reasonable arguments are being made from all quarters about White Papers, timing and procedure. I respect those arguments and sympathise with some of them, but we cannot allow process to trump substance, delay the timetable or impose the kind of fetters that would only weaken our leverage and strength as we go into the crucial Brexit negotiations. Tomorrow, every democrat in this House will have their cards called. Do we stand by the high-minded statements of democratic principle that we all espouse, or do we find some reason or pretext to justify escaping the inexorable requirements of the referendum, when we placed our trust in the people of this country? I know how seriously all Members will take that decision.

We also have an opportunity today to turn the page, to draw a line under the referendum and to build a stronger national unity of purpose. Those who, like me, voted leave need to listen and recognise the understandable anxieties around Brexit. We all need to realise that despite the polarising political debate and media coverage most people, whether they voted leave or remain, had some doubts. They felt the force of arguments on both sides, and they overwhelmingly now want to make Brexit work for our country, for our children and for our future.

That is why the Prime Minister's Lancaster House speech was so welcome and should give every hon. Member the confidence to support this Bill. The Prime Minister gave the country a detailed plan and, above that, a clear vision for a Britain where those who make the laws of the land are accountable to the citizens, a Britain that is open and outward looking but does not take for granted, ignore or scorn people's legitimate concerns about the scale or pace of immigration, and a Britain that is leaving the EU but holds out the hand of friendship to the nations and peoples of Europe on trade, security and wider co-operation. It was a vision of a global Britain with broader horizons, great ambition, a big heart and a noble mission to champion free trade. Whether it is about businesses that export, workers' wages or cheaper prices for consumers making ends meet, let us not forget that that mission is good for Britain. It is good for raising global living standards. It is good for our European friends, including the continental firms that sell us £60 billion more each year in goods and services than we sell them. It is good—no, it is vital—for the poorest African nations, currently languishing under the yolk of hypocritical western protectionism and for whom free trade is the surest route to real independence. This is not some grubby agenda but a lodestar for modern Britain. That is why, according to YouGov's poll after the Prime Minister's speech, the British public back the plan by three to one.

The British economy is strong and, with £1 trillion-worth of UK finance supporting European businesses and jobs, our negotiating leverage and, even more important, the scope for a win-win deal with our European friends is clear. We have the plan and we have the vision, so let us go into these negotiations with some ambition and self-belief befitting the character of this great country.

[Mr Dominic Raab]

From the German Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, to the Spanish Foreign Minister, Alfonso Dastis, key voices on the continent are saying loudly that they want to join us in forging the best deal for Britain and for Europe. As we begin these negotiations, we must in good faith, and with generosity of spirit on our side, take them at their word.

Let us end the divisions. Let us unite for the very best future we can secure for every corner and every citizen of this great country. I will vote for the Bill tomorrow confident that our best and brightest days lie ahead.

8.41 pm

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): On 23 June, the British public voted to leave the European Union. Leaving the single market and the customs union was not on the ballot paper, and nor was the even worse option of falling back on World Trade Organisation rules, yet that is what this Conservative Government are now pursuing with no mandate.

Yesterday, the Centre for Cities published a report showing that Exeter, which voted remain, is the most dependent community in Britain on exports to the rest of the European Union. We send 70% of what we export to other EU countries and just 7% to the United States. My neighbouring city of Plymouth, which voted leave, is second on that list, sending 68% of its exports to the European Union. The south-west of England as a whole is the region in the United Kingdom most dependent on exports to the rest of the EU.

Full and unfettered access to the single market is crucial to thousands of businesses and the people whom they employ in my constituency and the south-west of England. Falling back on WTO rules would mean tariffs of up to 51% on the goods that we currently export, as well as tariffs on imports, which would put up prices in the shops even higher for the hard-pressed consumer.

Let us be clear that there is no going back once article 50 is triggered. Unless there is a successful challenge to the current interpretation, this is a one-way street out of the EU to the hardest of hard Brexits.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I have the greatest respect for the right hon. Gentleman, who is making his argument powerfully, but does he not believe that the time for such arguments was during the referendum campaign and that now we should focus on a positive future using our entrepreneurial flair, our trading skills and our inventiveness to make a success of what lies before us?

**Mr Bradshaw:** Yes, that was the time for arguing the principle. This is the time for arguing about the type of Brexit that we believe is in the best interests of our country. I am afraid that some of my colleagues are clinging to the straw of the vote that the Government have promised on any deal at the end of the two-year negotiation process, yet the Government have made it absolutely clear that the only choice will be between their hard Brexit and WTO rules. This could be our only chance to prevent the hardest of Brexits or to soften its blow, and I cannot and will not vote to destroy jobs and prosperity in my constituency.

I fully accept that it is easier for me to vote against article 50 because my constituency voted remain. I have been overwhelmed by the support for my position that I have received from my constituents and Labour party members, but I completely understand that some colleagues, particularly those in areas that voted heavily to leave, will find it more difficult to do this. In the end, however, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) so ably reminded us, we are elected representatives who are called upon to use our own judgment about what is in the best interests of our constituencies and the country. Do we believe that cutting ourselves off from our closest friends and main trading partners will hurt or help our constituents and our country? Do we honestly think it is in our national interests to hitch ourselves to this American President? We will all be judged in the future on how we voted on this Bill.

Finally, let me say that I am disappointed and saddened by the decision of my party's leadership to try to force Labour MPs to support this Tory Bill. Even more, I regret that we are being whipped to vote to curtail our detailed debate to just three days—and this on the biggest issue of our lifetimes, which will have repercussions for generations to come. Scores of amendments to this Bill have been tabled, yet there is no chance of most of them being debated or voted upon. The situation is completely unacceptable and this is a dereliction of our duty as parliamentarians and as an Opposition.

**Mr Winnick** *rose*—

**Mr Bradshaw:** If my hon. Friend does not mind, I will finish now.

I will therefore vote against the Government's programme motion to curtail debate. For the first time in nearly 20 years in this place, I will be voting against my party's three-line whip on a Bill. In doing so, I am reflecting what I believe to be the majority view of those who elected me, and the view of millions of others in Britain who oppose this Government's choice to pursue the worst and most destructive form of Brexit, and all the negative consequences that that will bring.

8.46 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who argued his case with his characteristic clarity and eloquence. I campaigned for the UK to remain in the EU and I do not resile from a single argument I made in favour of that position—I happen to think I was right—but I recognise that I lost the argument. I did not agree with the referendum result, but I respect it. I am absolutely clear that democracy demands that we vote to trigger article 50 and that to do otherwise would be democratically unsustainable. Let me take a few moments to explain why.

The first point to make is that our relationship with the EU had to be resolved. Wherever one stands on the question of whether we should have been closer to or further away from the EU, the reality is that the UK's relationship with it lacked democratic legitimacy. The boil had to be lanced; the referendum had to take place. Some say that we should have not let the people have their say. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), whose speech was a masterclass

that I was privileged to witness, set out his view that this is not a matter that the people should decide. That might have been right in 1970, 1980 or 1990, but the culture of our country has moved to the point—whether we call it the collapse of the deference culture or something else—where a decision of this House on something of such enormous constitutional significance would not have the currency that the British people required. It had to be them who made the decision.

I stood on a manifesto that promised to offer the British people the referendum and to honour its result. The manifesto clearly stated:

“We will honour the result of the referendum, whatever the outcome.”

To betray that would be unconscionable. If that were not clear enough, on Second Reading of the Bill that became the European Union Referendum Act 2015, the then Foreign Secretary said that that Bill

“has one clear purpose: to deliver on our promise to give the British people the final say on our EU membership in an in/out referendum”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1047.]

How can anyone in this House who voted in favour of that somehow ignore the position now? How is that democratically sustainable? I say that as somebody who did not welcome the result, but I have to accept it.

During the campaign, I do not recall that it was ever suggested by anyone on either side of the debate that somehow the vote would or could be ignored. Everyone understood the vote’s significance, and not a single person I spoke to suggested that the result might not be respected. If there were any doubt about that, should we not reflect on the 72.2% turnout? The reason why the turnout was so great was because the British people recognised that they were being asked not for their advice, but for their instructions.

**George Kerevan:** Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a difference between voting to come out of the EU and coming out of the single market? Opposition Members are trying to argue that the Government are rushing to judgment on the single market.

**Alex Chalk:** I make two points in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, I am concerned that those who fasten on the point about the single market are using it as a fig leaf—an excuse to try to avoid the referendum result. Secondly, I am perfectly clear that I would have preferred to stay in the single market, but it has become tolerably plain over the past six months that that was never a credible option, because the four freedoms that the EU holds so dear—goods, services, labour and capital—are perceived to be utterly inviolable. There was never any flexibility on offer.

My personal view is that it would have been in the interest of the European Union to offer some flex in respect of the free movement of labour. Had that been offered to the former Prime Minister, we might have remained in. Indeed, had it been offered to our current Prime Minister, we might have remained in the single market, but that has never been on offer. Edmund Burke said:

“A state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation.”

The EU may, in due course, come to rue the decision not to offer some flexibility.

**Caroline Lucas:** I do wish that Government Members who say that we have to go for an extreme Brexit would stop rewriting history. At the time of the referendum, plenty of people, including Dan Hannan, were saying things like, “Absolutely nobody is talking about threatening to leave the single market.”

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. The hon. Lady has already spoken. Other Members present have not yet spoken, and the speech limit will already have to come down at some point, so I implore people who have spoken not to intervene, please, because it is literally taking time away from other Members.

**Alex Chalk:** True democrats must now turn to the future. What kind of country do we want to be? As the Prime Minister said, 23 June cannot be the moment when the United Kingdom stepped back from the world. It must be the moment we stepped forward. We must be more open, outward-looking, tolerant, international and global.

Little England has no appeal for me. We must remain a magnet for international talent and a beacon for those who want to come here to study and work. We must act quickly to resolve the status of EU nationals, who contribute so much to my constituency and the wider United Kingdom. That is the territory on which we must now fight. I am a European and I am a Briton, but I am also a democrat. Democracy demands that all those who voted in favour of the referendum last year do their duty tomorrow evening.

8.53 pm

**Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk). My speech will follow in a similar vein, except to say that it is the duty of every Member of this House to do what they believe to be in their good conscience. Whether that is supporting or opposing the Bill, I will respect each and every Member for the decision that they reach.

This is a speech that I had certainly hoped not to make, in a debate that I had hoped would not be necessary. I made my maiden speech in this House on Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill. I believe today, just as I believed then, that Britain would be stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union. I made that case on the doorstep in my constituency, in print, on the airwaves, in the Treasury Committee and in the Chamber. I have heard many powerful speeches today, particularly from my right hon. and hon. Friends, reminding me of why I made that case, but ultimately we must accept that the moment to make those arguments was during the referendum campaign, and we lost the debate throughout the country.

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum, I told my constituents that I would honour the result and hold the Government to account to secure the best possible deal for our country outside the European Union. That remains my intention today on a point of democratic principle. I have reflected deeply on the consequences of the decision taken on 23 June, and on what it means for our economy and our security, on what it says about how we see ourselves and our place in the world, and on how difficult it will be to extract ourselves from one of the most sophisticated and successful political and economic alliances in the history of the world, but I have also

[*Wes Streeting*]

reflected on the consequences of what would happen if this Parliament overturned the result of a referendum in which a clear choice was offered and a clear verdict was given.

We sometimes underestimate in this place the extent to which this Parliament operates in the context of a political crisis—a crisis of faith and trust in politics and politicians. Across western democracies, we are already witnessing the consequences of what happens when people abandon their faith in mainstream politics to deliver. At a time when liberal democracy feels so fragile and precious, it is hard to overstate the damage that this Parliament would inflict on our democracy were we to reject the outcome of a referendum in which 33.5 million people voted.

This was not an advisory referendum. None of us went to the door asking for advice. We warned of the consequences of leaving, and the majority of voters and the majority of constituencies voted leave with the clear expectation that that would actually happen. I say very simply to those lobbying Parliament to ignore the result, “My heart is absolutely with you, if only that were possible.” Let us be honest with ourselves and with each other: if the vote had gone the other way, we would have expected Parliament to abide by the result.

Just as those of us on the remain side must abide by the decision of the people, so must the victors. Many promises were made during the referendum campaign, so it might be just as well that so many of the leave campaign’s leading lights find themselves around the Cabinet table, well placed to deliver on their promises. Just as Brexit means Brexit, so too does £350 million a week to the NHS mean £350 million a week to the NHS. The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) said £100 million a week, so perhaps he would like to intervene so that he can address that point. Is it £350 million a week or £100 million a week?

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman is making a great speech—I am a huge admirer of his—but I ask him to show fidelity to the record. We actually give more than £350 million every week to the EU. We said that we should take back control of that money and spend it on our priorities. Specifically during the campaign, I argued that £100 million be spent on the NHS. If he wants to be economical with the actualité, that is for him, but fidelity to the record matters.

**Wes Streeting:** That contribution was rather too long to fit on the back of a bus. Leave campaigners do not like being reminded of this promise and they come up with every excuse they can find, but if people were promised a vote to leave and that is what we deliver, the additional funding for the NHS that they were promised should be delivered, too. The NHS message was one of the most prominent slogans of the campaign. It was particularly persuasive to Labour voters and NHS workers, and they expect the promise to be delivered. A heavy weight of responsibility rests on the shoulders of our Prime Minister as she embarks on negotiations that lie ahead. Some of those great enthusiasts for parliamentary sovereignty during the referendum campaign seem to have gone off the idea now that this Parliament demands a role in shaping the future of our country, but we

should absolutely shape the future of our country in the interests of not the 52% or the 48%, but the 100% of people whose interests are riding on the success of these negotiations.

Our priority should be protecting jobs and living standards, and the Prime Minister needs to do a hell of a lot better than a bad deal or no deal. No deal is a bad deal. People value our trading relationship with Europe and they were promised that our position in the single market would not be threatened. That is why I have tabled an amendment that would allow Parliament to debate our future relationship with the single market. The Prime Minister has a mandate to leave the European Union. She does not have a mandate to take us out of the single market or to drive our economy off a cliff.

The Prime Minister must maintain Britain’s strong global role and our co-operation with our European partners on defence and security, preventing international terrorism, tackling climate change, supporting science and innovation, and promoting democracy and human rights across the world. She has a duty to safeguard the rights and protections of Brits abroad, and a moral duty to the many EU citizens who have contributed enormously to the success of our country over many years. She also has a duty to this Parliament. It would be totally unacceptable—in fact it would be an outrage—if every other Parliament across the European Union, including the European Parliament, got to vote on the deal before this Parliament. If their voices and votes were to carry more than this Parliament’s, how would that be taking back control? Why will the Prime Minister not make a commitment today?

My party must once again reflect on the painful consequences of defeat at the ballot box. This is not an easy time to be a social democrat. We live in a time of surging nationalism and a growing instinct towards closed economies. We are wrestling with fundamental, profound economic and political change across the world—an industrial revolution of a pace and scale that the world has never seen. It is increasing the risk of inequality within and between nations, and it raises fundamental questions about community, identity and how we live alongside each other in a world with increasingly scarce resources.

I say to my party that if we want to be in government again and to create the world that we want to see, we must first engage with the world as it is. The reality of where we find ourselves today is that people have chosen to put this country on a very different course, outside the European Union. I wish that it was not so, but under the next Labour Government, that will be the reality. We must engage with it, shape it and earn the right to build a future for our country in the interests of everyone.

9 pm

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), whose speech was, as ever, impressive, principled and considered.

Today’s debate is to my mind about a straightforward decision that will mean that our country embarks on a necessary but inevitably complex journey to leave the European Union. As has been mentioned, this legislation is about the process. It is not a substantive Bill about the

merits or otherwise of leaving the European Union—that was for the referendum debates—and nor is it about the future deal that will come later in future legislation. It can be summed up in a few words, such as “respect the will of the people” and “respect the result of the referendum”. However, I have a good reason for adding a few more words during today’s debate.

I represent a constituency and borough that voted heavily to remain in the European Union. In Enfield, 76,000 people voted to remain, while 60,000 voted to leave. In my constituency only 37% voted to leave while 63% voted to remain. Among Brexiteers, I have the largest percentage of remain voters; after the Richmond Park by-election, *The Daily Telegraph* helpfully pointed out that I could be next in the firing line, although I will be avoiding a by-election if I can help it.

Inevitably, I have received many representations from constituents urging me to vote against the Bill and follow the example of Members such as the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms): to do what the majority of their constituents voted to do and to follow their consciences. However, it will be no surprise that I will not be following that course. I want to explain why and to urge hon. Members, particularly those representing remain-voting constituencies, to join me in the Aye Lobby tomorrow evening.

It should not surprise my constituents that I support the Bill. In 2015, following up our manifesto commitment to hold a referendum, I made it clear that unless we controlled our borders I would be campaigning to leave the European Union. When the then Prime Minister returned with his deal, he was unable properly to answer my questions in the House such as how he could reconcile the inadequate controls on freedom of movement in the deal with my expectations and those of countless party workers and supporters over a number of years. Emblazoned on our leaflets was our party’s commitment to control our borders. We need to follow through on that commitment.

Brexit gives us the opportunity to regain control of our borders—not in the way President Trump is pursuing, which is a thinly veiled attempt to discriminate against Muslims and involves offensive nationality profiling, which must be strongly condemned at all levels. I look forward to control of our borders that is more, not less, welcoming of the skills that we most need in our country, and more, not less, welcoming of the refugees who need our sanctuary most. Of course, I also look forward to Parliament’s regaining control of our laws and our money as well.

The wider concern of my constituents was that politicians should do what they say. I am doing what I said I would do: I am voting out of a matter of conscience, judgment and duty to trigger article 50. My vote is not just about my constituency; it is about what Parliament intended in the UK referendum. The European Union Referendum Act 2015 gave us the legal authority for the historic referendum result. The intention of Parliament was undeniably that the result should be respected and enacted; the majority in favour of the Bill was huge, at 10 to one. During deliberations on the referendum Bill, the issue was about ensuring that the campaign was fair to enable confidence in the result. There were a few concerns that the referendum was unclear or unfair. It was mainly left to the Brexiteers and, indeed, the Scottish National party to lead the scrutiny to ensure that the

purdah period was not misused. However, the leaflet, costing £9 million of taxpayers’ money, was still sent out to convince the public of the merits of remaining in the European Union. The most important words on that leaflet were:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

During the deliberations on the European Union Referendum Act, few really questioned the legitimacy or finality of the decision. We knew what we were getting ourselves into, providing an act of direct democracy to the British people to make a decision on the important question of European Union membership. It is important to recognise that that view came from all sources and many parties in the House. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), said at the time that it was a once-in-a-lifetime decision—no word of a second referendum from him then.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who is not in place, also said on the BBC last year that this House

“is a place of great pomposity, a lot of wasted words”,

and that it is “more theatre” than it is any good. Does my hon. Friend agree that this House and the express will of the British people deserve better than haughty disdain from the Liberals?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. As there are many interventions, they need to be short.

**Mr Burrows:** I recognise those words spoken by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). This is all about restoring our parliamentary sovereignty and the authority of our Parliament. There is an absence of respect for this House on the Opposition Benches, and it speaks volumes.

The then Europe Minister, who is now the Leader of the House, is in his place. At the end of the deliberations on the European Union Referendum Act, he said that the package would ensure a referendum

“in which the whole country can have confidence.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 117.]

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said that the referendum was a mechanism for the British people to make a judgment, but that

“the really important thing is the decision itself.”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1063.]

A decision has now been made and we must respect it. It was not an advisory survey, but a mandated decision.

As the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said in his very considered speech today, the result of the referendum, whether we like it or not, must be respected. The current Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), said that

“the decision about our membership should be taken by the British people, not by Whitehall bureaucrats, certainly not by Brussels Eurocrats; not even by Government Ministers or parliamentarians in this Chamber. The decision must be for the common sense of the British people. That is what we pledged, and that is what we have a mandate to deliver.”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 1056.]

[Mr Burrowes]

Well, the decision has been made and we now have a duty to deliver by formally starting the process.

What should hon. Members with majority remain constituents such as mine do? On this occasion, I would follow the advice of the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who said that “17 million people voted for Leave, many in some of our poorest areas. How would it look if a bunch of politicians and commentators in London turned around and said, ‘We know you voted to leave but we are just going to ignore you.’ That would be very undermining of democracy.”

I agree with her; we must not undermine democracy.

My remain-voting constituents are not being ignored by my voting to trigger article 50—my solemn duty is to respect the will of the majority throughout the UK—but I will continue to respect their concerns and challenges, and to bring them to Ministers’ attention. I recognise that their concerns have to be heard.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman’s analysis. I will vote to invoke article 50 because of that respect for democracy. He mentioned heeding the views of the remain voters in his area, so does he believe that we should have a meaningful vote on the deal, and not a yes or no rejection of it?

**Mr Burrowes:** I agree, and there is a commitment to that. Once the negotiations have happened, we should have a full debate and a full vote. I will ensure that my constituents’ concerns—whether remain or Brexit—all come to bear so that we deliver for our country. That is what it is about. Now is not the time or place to sidestep the decisive result of 23 June, nor to undermine the decision of 17 million people. Let us get on with it and make the best of Brexit for all my constituents and for people throughout the United Kingdom.

9.9 pm

**Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): I campaigned passionately during last year’s referendum for Britain to remain in the EU and still feel passionately about it. I remain deeply concerned about the outcome and what is to follow, but the British people voted to leave. As strongly as I hold my views, it is only right that the wishes of the majority of the British people should be respected, because the real decision to trigger article 50 is not taken tomorrow night—it was taken on 23 June 2016.

It is fair to say that although the referendum question asked voters whether they wanted to remain in or leave the EU, it did not detail what “leave” actually meant. That argument still needs to be thoroughly addressed. Simply to say that out means out is not a policy—the issue is far too complicated for that. The result of last year’s referendum did not point to the door through which we should exit. There are many doors and exit strategies to consider. If those who voted to leave did so to “take back control”, then surely it should be Parliament that decides through which door we should leave.

There are many questions to answer. What is to be the final article 50 deal? What will a future free trade agreement between the EU and the UK look like? What will be the consequences for jobs? Will the assurances

given to Nissan also be given to other sectors of the economy? What will our relationship be with the customs union? There are questions around workers’ and consumer rights, as well as the environment and, of course, immigration. I would like to see an agreement that reforms free movement and allows tariff-free and unimpeded access to the single market, with a transitional arrangement, if necessary—as it probably will be—to prevent our economy from falling off a cliff edge. Even the International Trade Secretary has said that he wants

“at least as free a trading environment as we have today.”

The Prime Minister has said she wants to give companies “maximum freedom to trade with and operate in the Single Market”.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that people did not vote “to become poorer”. I want this House to hold them to this.

If there is one thing that the result of the referendum proved, it is that we need a new settlement on free movement, but it must be balanced with what is best for the economy. To have a lasting settlement, there should be a Europe-wide agreement. Pulling down the shutters on the rest of Europe is not the answer. People did not vote to have fewer rights at work, yet I see that the Prime Minister has committed to those rights only while she is in power. I can understand that, but what happens next? I do not want to see a race to the bottom. I want the people I represent to be protected against future challenges, of which there will be many. There is a mandate for Britain’s exit from the EU, but there is no mandate on the manner in which we leave. That is why the Government must come to this House to inform Parliament of their progress throughout the negotiations, and we must be given a vote on the final deal. We should also be given an impact assessment of the effect of the deal on the economy and all its sectors, and this country’s future.

As the Prime Minister searches for trade deals that we cannot start negotiating formally until we have left the EU, she should consider the manner in which she proceeds. The Prime Minister knows the dilemma this country is in, but she must consider her demeanour. She shows too much haste, especially in securing a state visit for the President of the United States seven days into his presidency when President Reagan waited 17 months to visit the UK. It was not even a state visit, and we all know how close President Reagan was to Margaret Thatcher. All this reveals that the Prime Minister’s haste is undue. Some say that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations would be a risky agreement between the US, representing 350 million consumers, and the EU of 28 countries, representing half a billion. Wait until we see what is on offer from President Trump, who puts “America first”, when he knows he is negotiating with one country of 65 million people that is desperate for a deal. I do not believe that this fact will have been lost on the arch-dealmaker himself. If the Prime Minister is prepared to walk away from the EU because

“no deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain”,

will she walk away from a trade deal with the US on the same basis? The Government want to see us as a great global trading nation, and I do as well. So to avoid us standing on the street corner, cap in hand, I would not walk away from the EU without a deal being struck. Without a deal, I would stay at the negotiating table until I got one—walking away is not an option.

I know that my voting to trigger article 50 may come as a disappointment to some of my constituents, while others may believe that leaving the EU is the correct course. The debate in the House of Commons over the next two weeks will be the start of the process, not the end. I reserve judgment as to my future voting intentions. We need to get what follows right. As much as I do not like the result of the EU referendum, neither can I ignore it. I will therefore continue to exercise my duty in good faith, with the wellbeing of my constituents and the country at the forefront of the decisions I make. I quote the Secretary of State for Brexit:

“If a democracy cannot change its mind, it ceases to be a democracy.”

9.14 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), and I share many of his concerns. I also campaigned and voted in the EU referendum to remain, and the majority of my constituents voted to remain. Like the hon. Gentleman and many others in the Chamber, I did not expect this result. On 23 June, I was not happy with the result. I am still not happy with the result, but I recognise that it is a national vote.

Many Members have quoted from the leaflet that was delivered to every single household in the United Kingdom. I do not have my original leaflet, but I have kept the leaflet that a constituent gave me, in which is pasted, on all the picture pages—if hon. Members can remember those—more thoughtful and in-depth articles. I kept it because I always thought, “I wish that this had been the leaflet that everybody had received.” The text pages are intact, and it is true that on page 14, the leaflet states:

“This is your decision. The Government will implement what you decide.”

The month before the referendum, my constituents voted in another election. The majority of my constituents and I voted for the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, who did not win. However, in the first few days after Sadiq Khan became Mayor of London, I wrote to him as the MP for Twickenham outlining some of the issues on which I wanted to work with him, and I am grateful that he is representing London and doing good things for Twickenham.

In that vein, I will be voting to trigger article 50, because I believe it is in our best interests but also because I would be a hypocrite if I tried to block it. I know very well that if the result had been 52% to remain and 48% to leave and if my colleagues in the Chamber were trying to block that, I would be vehemently opposed to what they were trying to do.

There is an argument that I should vote according to how my constituency voted, and that is a valid argument. Apart from the fact that if every MP voted according to the results in his or her constituency, article 50 would probably still be triggered, my reason for not voting in that way is that I believe to do so would entrench existing divisions. It would alienate voters—remain voters and leave voters—who went into the polling station or filled out their postal vote believing the leaflet that stated: “This is your decision.”

We need to seek the best possible access to the single market, tariff free and barrier free. I will continue to maintain my position that EU nationals working and living in my constituency and throughout the United

Kingdom should be guaranteed their rights, and that that should not be part of the negotiations. I hope that in the negotiations we will have migration controls but not arbitrary restrictions. We should welcome students, workers and family members from the EU and from non-EU countries.

The White Paper will give us a chance to provide scrutiny. I value the scrutiny carried out by the Select Committee on Science and Technology, and I value the fact that the Committee is made up of MPs who voted to remain and MPs who voted to leave. I am proud of the fact that we had unanimous Committee reports while I was interim Chair, and that we have continued to do so under our new Chair. Our reports on the EU are about striving to get the best deal for scientists and science projects.

I remain a remain voter and somebody who wishes the referendum result had been different, but as was said by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who is no longer in his place, our task is now to bring people together, and I will influence the course we are now on. To that end, I will accept and respect the validity of the referendum, and I will vote to trigger article 50.

9.20 pm

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias). You can always tell when Members are listening, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the Chamber is quiet, and it was quiet throughout her speech, which she delivered with great aplomb. Now, you can cue the noise because the SNP are about to speak.

In Scotland, we were told in no uncertain terms in 2014 that we are a family of nations, and that we must keep this family together. The one nation mantra was conspicuous by its absence: “We don’t want you to leave the Union,” was the cry. “We want you to lead the Union.” At the very point that we suggested we might just be about to take the UK at its word, those words are feeling more than a little hollow. To make those words a reality, discussion in the Joint Ministerial Committee is not enough; we must see real and tangible signs that our proposals will be agreed to.

In my view, this is not one nation. By definition, it is a collection of four nations. Some would say it is a family, albeit with very grown-up kids. In any family, regard is always paid to the differences between the members of the family—they do not buy shoes of the same size, and they certainly do not apply the same rules or follow the same path—but ultimately, if they listen and respect such differences, they can remain a family. Even that, however, is contingent on continuing and demonstrable mutual respect.

In this so-called family—one of equal partners, as we were told—the UK must do more than merely talk with the nations within it and say, as it repeatedly asserts, that it is taking their views on board. The UK must go beyond such discussions and act on those views, and it must demonstrate that it understands the dynamics that underpin the stability of this Union. That is how a family can be kept together. It cannot be done by simple binary prescription. What people cannot do in any family is simply run the line, “You voted to be in this family, so you now have to do what we all do.” It would not work for our own families, and it will not work for this one.

[Richard Arkless]

We are living in a modern world, and small countries no longer fear the world, but see its opportunities. There are Parliaments in each of our nations. Each is carving out a different path, just as in any normal family. Each nation in this Union has distinct cultures, political views and, indeed, accents—and each of those nations delivered a different verdict on 23 June. For this family to remain intact, as I am certain is the intention of Conservative Members, specific allowances must be made for these differences.

**Richard Drax:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Arkless:** I will not give way, because I am conscious that I am only the third SNP MP to speak, and we have been in the Chamber for about 10 hours.

Despite what seems to be the conventional wisdom among Conservative Members, there are indeed ways to keep everybody here happy. The UK can leave the EU and Scotland can remain in the single market. Scotland can continue to benefit from the free movement of labour while the UK leaves the customs union, so that the UK has the ability to restrict EU migration to the nations that voted leave, all within the existing parameters of the UK.

The proposals from Scotland can be found in “Scotland’s Place in Europe”. It is crucial to mention at this stage that this document represents a massive compromise on the part of the SNP and the Scottish Government. We are willing to accept that Scotland and the UK as a whole leaves the EU—I would be glad if that was not the case, but we will compromise. We are even willing to take independence off the table, at least in the short to medium term—again, we are willing to compromise. However, for that to happen, we need compromise on a similar scale from the UK Government. That is how families should operate. If it can be done for Nissan, it can be done for Scotland. None of the options in our report is impossible, but all require the will of the rest of the family to get behind them. That, I fear, will be their downfall. In short, our proposal is for Scotland to maintain its membership of the single market and continue to benefit from the pillar of free movement.

**Mr Baker:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Arkless:** I have already explained why I am not going to take any interventions and my mind has not changed.

While accommodating Scotland’s wishes, in parallel we set out a way for the rest of the UK to leave the single market and free movement, and to remove the entirety of the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. I have never had a problem with the ECJ, but, as I say, we are in compromise mode.

We have heard today from those on the Conservative Benches that the single market is apparently an internal EU market, and that leaving the EU *de facto* means leaving the single market. Well, that is just plain wrong. Members of the EEA are in the single market but are not members of the EU—Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland have that status. Switzerland is a member of the European Free Trade Association, but is in neither the EU nor the EEA. Bespoke solutions are out there. It just requires the political will to pursue them.

I often hear that different rules across the UK would weaken the Union. In fact, the complete opposite is true. If proper and substantive regard is not paid to these differences, tensions in the relationships will come under strain—that much should be obvious to all. It is not the SNP who have put independence back on the table, but this Government. If it is back on the table, it will be only because this Government do not listen. Scotland’s distinct mandate and voice must be respected.

9.26 pm

**Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con):** This has been a fantastic debate, which has focused on parliamentary sovereignty. And how good it is to see the Deputy Leader of the House starting on chapter one of “Erskine May”, such is his inspiration from the speeches that have been made today. It is never too late to start.

I was reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who has monitored everything we have said over the past decade—he pointed out to the leader of the Green party her anti-European stance a year ago—that my maiden speech, over a decade ago, was on Europe. I was in a sandwich between the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), if you can imagine that, Madam Deputy Speaker—stuck between a hard Europhile and a tough Brexiteer. I was somewhere in the middle. I described the European Union then as out of touch and a relic of the past, because Europe did have its faults: I would fight to my last political breath to stop us entering the single currency, the social chapter was a step too far, and the way that mass immigration has been handled has been a disaster.

However, I remain, with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), a remainer. I campaigned for remain, and I can see the huge virtues and benefits of being a member of the European Union. I will, however, vote to support the Bill. It is a difficult thing for me to vote for. My constituency is solidly remain and has benefited from being a part of the European Union. We have benefited in so many ways that during the campaign I tried hard to see what the downsides were. As an MP, I could not think of a single law where Europe had got in the way—not even when voting for the brilliant education reforms of the former Education Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). At no point did Europe trouble the sovereignty of this House, but it has given this country so many opportunities.

I approach the coming Brexit with a degree of nervousness. There is no point in crying over spilt milk. I absolutely accept the logic that if one backed the referendum by voting for it in this House, one then has to respect the result. One cannot use one’s privileged position in Parliament to stop the Brexit result. We can and must, however, hold the Government to account on a range of different issues. We promised in our manifesto that we would stay in the single market, but we all know that leaving the EU means we have to leave the single market and the customs union. We want to see how the Government will square that circle.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the plight of EU nationals. I have been inundated with emails from my constituents. One came in about an hour ago: “I am one of your constituents and I am still scared after

seven months. My home is the UK, my Government is British and my Member of Parliament is you. I do not want to lose everything.” This lady is French. She has come over here and taken our jobs. She is a civil nuclear engineer: a highly skilled person providing a vital role in the UK. There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people like her in the UK, and they need certainty as soon as possible. I understand the Government’s negotiating position, but I want some reassurances.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is hard to be a remainer with remain constituents firing off such emails on an hourly, never mind a daily, basis. Would my right hon. Friend argue, like me, that the best thing we can do for them is fight with every fibre of our being to make sure that this deal is absolutely everything they need it to be?

**Mr Vaizey:** Yes, and I will stand solidly with my hon. Friend on that. I want to protect the position of my constituents who are EU nationals and I want to protect the position of EU nationals in the UK.

The constituent I quoted is a scientist, which leads me to my third point. I am so angry with the Government over their position on Euratom. Not a single Minister has contacted me, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) or my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). The Culham research centre, the site of the Joint European Torus, employs hundreds of people and is at the heart of nuclear fusion research. We have all been inundated with countless emails from people who believe they are losing their job. The European Space Agency is in my constituency. If the Government are to make such an announcement in the explanatory notes of a Bill, at least they could alert the relevant MPs beforehand, and at least they could provide my constituents with a definitive statement about the future of European co-operation on civil nuclear engineering. I hope that Ministers will meet me this week and provide me with some material to give constituents of mine who are worried about their jobs, who have bought houses in this country and who want to know what the future holds.

I also wish to mention what was a personal passion as a Minister: the creative industries and technology. We need the skills from the European marketplace and we need certainty regarding the broadcasting directive. Many broadcasters, based in this country and providing thousands of jobs, are able to broadcast throughout Europe. And let us not forget culture. When we had the argument about TTIP, the first thing the French did was cut out culture from any free trade deal, and they will try the same when we negotiate our trade deal with Europe.

Talking of trade deals, one thing that really irritates me about this debate is the fiction that on day one of leaving the EU we will be handed a suite of lovely trade deals and we will simply sign them. We have already heard about this from Members. The campaigns and demos when we try to sign a free trade deal with the US, particularly on issues such as agriculture and manufacturing, will be huge. It will take years to negotiate them. I accept that they will happen, but I ask Members please not to mock others’ intelligence by pretending we are going to sign a suite of trade deals on day one of leaving the EU.

Also, please do not call us remainers “unpatriotic”. I had a meeting with constituents last week on Brexit, and I am having another at the end of this week, and many of those present are scientists. One in particular struck me when he stood up and said, “I’m a remainer. I have worked in science all my life. I have contributed to British science, and I am being made to feel unpatriotic because I work closely with my European counterparts and passionately believe that British science is better off in Europe.”

Finally, can we talk about the process? Again, I am sick and tired, considering that we are now restoring parliamentary sovereignty, of being told that to ask as a remainer that the Government be held to account, report back every three months on the process and progress and publish a White Paper is somehow trying to stop Brexit. It is not. If you are a Brexiteer and you believe in parliamentary sovereignty, or if you are a remainer and you hold on to the silver lining that parliamentary sovereignty is coming back, the logic is that it is incumbent on us all—

**Michael Gove:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Vaizey:** I give way to the man on the rocks of whose leadership bid—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. The right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) has actually run out of time.

9.33 pm

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey). I agree with much of what he said about trade and parliamentary accountability.

After a great deal of thought, I have decided to vote against Second Reading tomorrow night, for a number of reasons that I would like to set out precisely. First, the Government’s behaviour since the referendum result has influenced my decision. The new Government have acted as though the vote gave them carte blanche to engineer the most extreme kind of arrangements for the UK leaving the EU, though in truth the referendum asked only whether voters wished to remain or leave and had nothing to say about the nature of the subsequent arrangements the UK should adopt.

The Government have embarked upon this approach without any kind of consultation across party or any meaningful involvement in Parliament, which, as the Supreme Court has just reaffirmed, is the sovereign power in the land. Consultation across parties would be the norm when dealing with proposals of serious constitutional change. It has not happened. We would not have this Bill before us now had not the courts, when asked, upheld our constitution and made it clear that prerogative powers cannot be used to remove the rights of individual citizens that have been conferred by statute. Yet the judges in the High Court were vilified for doing their job and attacked by a Cabinet Minister, who said that their judgment was

“an attempt to frustrate the will of the British people”

and was “unacceptable”. The Government are looking distinctly authoritarian in their demeanour and how they operate.

**Michael Gove:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Maria Eagle:** No, I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Michael Gove:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** It had better be a point of order.

**Michael Gove:** No such statement was made by any Cabinet Minister and I hope the hon. Lady will withdraw.

**Maria Eagle:** I do not intend to respond to the right hon. Gentleman. He had his chance earlier.

This authoritarian demeanour is alien to our British tradition, and the sooner the new Government realise it and mend their ways, the better. Secondly, the nature of the exit that the Government seem intent on pursuing has influenced me. I think that this extreme, right-wing exit that they are pursuing, without any authorisation from this Parliament or the people of this country, will damage the jobs and economy of the UK, undermine our standing and position in the world and hit the poorest, like many who live and work in my constituency, the hardest.

I disagree that the Prime Minister should simply give up on single market membership—something that has benefited and could continue to benefit our people as workers and consumers greatly—without even bothering to negotiate on it, even though she was elected on a manifesto in the 2015 general election that promised to stay in the single market. It said:

“We are clear about what we want from Europe. We say: yes to the Single Market.”

Why did the Prime Minister not make pursuing membership of the single market part of her negotiating position?

Thirdly, although we have recently been given vague promises of further votes in this place after the negotiations, it remains unclear to me whether they will be meaningful in any way. This Bill therefore represents the only real opportunity at present that parliamentarians have to make their concerns known and shape the kind of exit that we get. I think the Government intend it to be the only opportunity we get, and let us remind ourselves: they did not intend that we should have this one. Once article 50 is triggered, time is set running and at the expiry of two years, the UK is out of the EU, unless all 27 countries agree to some alternative arrangements for those negotiations to continue in the interim. Simply by the effluxion of time, whatever the state of the negotiations, the reality will be that we are out—over a cliff edge, over a precipice. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) let the cat out of the bag in his speech, and the Government themselves argued before the courts that the process is irrevocable once set in motion.

Had the Government produced a White Paper following consultations about what kind of exit we should seek to secure and had they tried to reach a consensus across parties on what was best for the country, in order to bring it together and reconcile the 48% who voted to remain in an open and meaningful way, the triggering of article 50 may not have seemed the watershed or the last possible point of parliamentary influence that it now seems. The Government have had plenty of time to

undertake such a process, but they have spent it telling parliamentarians that “Brexit means Brexit”, pointlessly appealing the High Court judgment—with an entirely predictable result—and refusing to say anything of substance on the grounds that it will compromise our negotiating position. The effluxion of time is what will compromise our negotiating position. What pressure will there be on our partners to agree to anything, when by simply biding their time we will be expelled, perhaps without any of the agreements we seek?

Fourthly, I represent a city and a constituency that voted to remain, and I feel the need to represent the views of my constituents on such a momentous issue. In Liverpool, we have seen over many years the advantages of EU membership at first hand. As the Tory Government of Margaret Thatcher genuinely considered organising the “managed decline” of Liverpool in the early 1980s, when I was growing up there, it was the European Economic Community that began to send what over the years became billions of pounds of structural funds to help the regeneration of the city.

**Ms Angela Eagle:** Will my hon. Friend explain to the House precisely how important objective 1 was to the regeneration of Liverpool in those dark times?

**Maria Eagle:** It stopped the city from falling even further than it had already fallen, and it gave us a real boost in starting the regeneration of the city. That is perhaps why Liverpool voted to remain.

If we leave the EU in the way in which the current Government want, it will be people such as my constituents, who have had almost seven years of coalition and Tory Government public spending cuts, who will be hit again and hit disproportionately. I fear that the extreme exit that the Prime Minister has decided we are to pursue will, over a few years, destroy our industrial base and our manufacturing industry. Of course, with such a divisive, irreconcilable and irreversible vote, some of my constituents will not like what I do whatever I do, but as their MP, I owe them my sincere judgment, and that is what I am giving them tonight.

I accept that the Government will get their way tomorrow night, and if they do, I expect to support the many excellent amendments being put forward by my Front-Bench team and others to try to improve the Bill, but I hope that the Government will, even now, see the benefit of accepting some of the amendments and try at this late stage to proceed in a way designed to bring the country together and not to ride roughshod over those with whom they disagree.

9.40 pm

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** “God’s diplomacy”. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) reminded us how Richard Cobden described free trade—and it is a description I very much wish I had had in mind last Friday, when I was asked rhetorically to describe free trade. The same person went on to ask me how, without taxation and redistribution in Europe, we would foster a culture of “diffused reciprocity”. After I had had a while to try to work out what that meant, I realised that I believe that trade is a far better way of showing people that we are co-dependent in this world—that we depend on one another for our livelihoods, our prosperity and our happiness—than tax and forced

redistribution through systems that people barely understand. That, I think, is the crux of the matter, which has been touched on elsewhere in the debate.

In so far as the European Union does deliver free trade, it does so through political union. The pattern of free trade through political union and political power beyond democratic control has run its course. If any Member disagrees, I invite them to look at the hollowing out of the centre ground of politics right around the world and to ask themselves why it is not just populism and nationalism on the right that are on the rise, but why populism and harder left policies are arising in a number of countries.

The truth is that several factors are at work in our world at the moment that have delivered us into a profound crisis of political economy. On another occasion, I would be glad to set it out, but in the interests of time let me just say that our trade policy and the tendency to political centralisation is one of the key pillars that has caused the crisis. I think we need a new system of free trade—one that can deliver four things: free trade, self-government, fighting crony capitalism at home and defending against distortions if not predatory practice in countries overseas. If we can deliver those four things, I think we can reinvigorate faith in free trade—a faith generally held right across the House—among working people, who can see that free trade and worldwide co-operation on a fair basis, in which people are not undercut by state subsidies in far-off places, is in all our interests.

**Mr Nuttall:** Given how damaging uncertainty is to business and trade, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be in our national interest for the article 50 notice to be given as soon as possible?

**Mr Baker:** I do agree. Since we are having this debate and are passing, I hope, this Bill, I think the Prime Minister will be well equipped to get on with it swiftly.

The more I work in my capacity as chairman of the European research group with Legatum Institute Special Trade Commission, the more I realise that the four points I have described are highly realisable. The more the Government come to realise that, the more confident they will be to trigger article 50 early.

My second point is that we are here today, of course, to agree the principle of this Bill, and it is a simple principle—that we should confer on the Prime Minister the power to see through the referendum result. I consider myself blessed indeed that the Wycombe district voted remain. I say “blessed indeed” because, although my constituency covers only three fifths of the district, I am well aware that, given the position that I have held with my colleagues and the work that I am now doing, if I did not have that constant reminder that we must serve 100% of this country, it would be easy to be too “hard over” on the issues. We must listen to everyone and take account of their concerns, but we must also see through what is in the best interests of this country, and I believe that that is the complete fulfilment of the 12-point plan set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

In that context of fulfilling the wishes of the British public—the whole nation—I would say that all choices have consequences. The Lisbon treaty meant that the European Union constitution was bootied through against the positive expressed wishes of populations. That drove

me into politics, because I thought it important for power always to originate with the people. Similarly, I think that if the House were to refuse the passage of this Bill, we would suffer in this country a political implosion whose nature we can scarcely imagine.

Today, I believe, we can objectively say that only one party is capable of forming a stable Government, although I would prefer there to be two. I believe that if we were to go ahead and refuse to pass the Bill, even our own party would suffer grave consequences. It is in all our interests for it to be passed.

With that in mind, I should like briefly to defend the former Prime Minister, who has been described today—most unfairly, in my view—as reckless. I dare say, and I think that the record will bear it out, that I have done more than any other Conservative Member in the last year to organise opposition to David Cameron, and it is for that reason that I feel able to say that, in my experience, everything he did was motivated by the very highest concerns for this country. He needed to keep our party together so that it could survive a referendum that was necessary, and still be capable, as it is today, of being strong, united and determined to see through the best interests of the country.

Although we differed in the judgment, I am absolutely sure that David Cameron campaigned for remain because he believed that it was in the country’s interest. I believe that far from being reckless, as he was accused of being earlier, he served this country with profound decency, and, above all, with the pragmatic conservatism which—in his view—led him to campaign for remain in the best interests of the country. Of course I disagreed with him, and I am glad that we are where we are. If I have a lament, it is that he is no longer here—

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

**Mr Baker:** I cannot, because others wish to speak.

If I have a regret, it is that David Cameron is not with us today. [*Interruption.*] I mean that he is not with us in the House today. [*Laughter.*] I am grateful for the lighter tone.

I hope very much that in years to come, when future generations look back on this moment—not only on this issue, but on social reform and the reform of our public services—David Cameron will be seen as the great statesman he is.

9.48 pm

**Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), who made an interesting speech. [*Laughter.*]

I am a passionate supporter of the European Union, with both my heart and my head. I am married to a Dane, and both my daughters were born in Brussels. I have lived, worked and studied in a number of European countries, and I have first-hand experience of how inspiring and productive international political co-operation and economic solidarity can be. I campaigned passionately for remain, and I am in no doubt that the result of the referendum will eventually weaken our economy, erode our sovereignty, and diminish our place in the world; but I am, above all else, a democrat. The debate in this country was had. The votes were cast, the ballots were counted, and my side of the argument lost. The rules

[Stephen Kinnock]

are the rules, and any attempt to frustrate the process will serve only to corrode our democracy further, and to cause deep and lasting damage to our institutions.

The Brexit process will have two phases, as stipulated in section 1 of article 50. The first will be withdrawal. That will be done through the triggering of article 50, a process limited in scope to the detailed terms of the divorce, and to the specific mechanics of disentangling Britain from the European Union. Then comes phase 2, the process through which we establish our post-Brexit relationship with the EU27 as a non-EU member state. That will be conducted through article 218. This second phase will take several years and will require ratification by 38 parliamentary Chambers, from Brussels to Berlin, from Warsaw to Wallonia. It is the article 218 process that will address the core questions that have come to dominate our politics for the last year or so, namely free movement of labour and the status of our relationship with the single market and the customs union. So, in spite of all the sound and fury we have heard today, the success or failure of Brexit will in fact depend on the terms of the article 218 package, not on the details of what is agreed under article 50.

In her Lancaster House speech, the Prime Minister claimed that it would be possible to negotiate both the article 50 deal and the article 218 deal by the spring of 2019. This was a deeply irresponsible and deluded claim; it is absolutely absurd to believe that the 38 Parliaments across the continent will be ready, willing or able to ratify such a complex, politically sensitive and comprehensive package in two years. It is therefore high time that this Government levelled with the British people.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Why was it, then, that Michel Barnier, the EU commissioner charged with Brexit negotiations, said he wanted the negotiations finished within 18 months, and then six months for the ratification process to take place? Was he not telling the truth?

**Stephen Kinnock:** Michel Barnier was referring to the article 50 process; the article 218 process, which will define our future end-state relationship with the EU, is a completely different matter. It is worth noting as well that Michel Barnier has quoted a figure of €60 billion as the cost of leaving the EU.

It is therefore time that the Government levelled with the British people. The very best we can hope for is an acceptable article 50 exit deal, alongside an interim transitional package that avoids the disastrous cliff edge of resorting to WTO rules. And what is the most likely form of this interim deal? It is quite clearly the European economic area. The EU will not be minded to do a bespoke interim deal for the United Kingdom. Why should it when the EEA is a ready-made, off-the-shelf solution? It is therefore beyond doubt in my opinion that our EU partners will simply insist that we transfer to the EEA while the article 218 process runs in parallel.

We do not know how long this holding pattern would last, but what we do know is that the EEA, as a halfway house, would be infinitely preferable to the train crash option of a WTO Brexit. A WTO Brexit would mean crippling tariffs, job losses, the decline of our automotive and steel industries, the hobbling of our financial services industry and the probable demise of our entire

manufacturing sector. The British people will not stand for that. The Government have a mandate for us to leave the European Union, and this House has an obligation to enable that mandate to be fulfilled, but there is no mandate for this Government to use Brexit as an excuse for wrecking our economy, slashing the minimum wage and sparking a bonfire of workers' rights, environmental safeguards and hard earned-social protections.

Tomorrow marks the end of the phoney war. Since 23 June, we have had endless debates about process, but once article 50 has been triggered the focus will at long last move to substance. Once article 50 has been invoked the real choice facing this Government, this House and this country will become clear: will we choose an interim deal that truly protects the national interest, or will we tumble head first into a WTO Brexit that will have a catastrophic impact on our economy, our communities and our place in the world?

We know that the currently dominant nationalist wing of the Conservative party will hate the idea of an interim deal, as it will inevitably be based on the EEA model, but surely this country has had its fill of Prime Ministers who place personal ambition and party management ahead of the national interest. I therefore urge this Government to learn from the mistakes of the past and to commit unequivocally to basing their approach to Brexit on securing the safe haven of an interim deal. The alternative would result in the warping of our country into a European version of the Cayman Islands, and that is an alternative that we cannot and will not accept.

9.54 pm

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). I always listen with interest to his speeches on a wide range of topics, and I have done so again this evening. Since I was elected in 2010, I have studiously avoided speaking in any debate on the European Union or the UK's membership of it, but tonight that seven-year abstinence must come to an end before the opportunity to speak on the topic has gone. I welcome the speech made by the Prime Minister the other week. Its content and tone provided an important next step towards the way in which our country is going to come together as we leave the European Union. Similarly, today's debate, in which it has been a pleasure to take part, has represented an additional step forward in that process for the country.

Like many on the Conservative Benches, I commend the speech made by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He had a difficult task, and his speech was akin to throwing a rope across the enormous chasm that has existed in the Labour party on this issue. I think we should all commend him for traversing that chasm safely and wisely today. Such wisdom was, alas, lacking from the speech by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), who locked his fellow Liberal Democrat Members in the Lib Dem taxicab and drove it over the edge of the chasm. He showed no respect whatever for creating unity between the people on the two sides in the referendum. The Liberal Democrats need to understand that if they speak only to the 48%, they will be out of touch with the direction in which the mood of the British public is going, which is towards bringing us all together.

I want to comment further on the rights of EU nationals. I was one of five Conservative Members of Parliament who supported the Opposition motion to grant automatic rights to EU nationals, and I am still strongly in favour of doing so. The conversation has been about whether we should do that unilaterally or through the negotiations. It has also been commented that the Government have a responsibility to look after the interests of British citizens in other EU countries, and that is undoubtedly true, but I do not believe that it is legitimate to hold one as a counterbalance to the other. I therefore ask the Government to look again at this issue, and to investigate a third option of securing rights bilaterally rather than multilaterally or unilaterally.

One of the Government's most important tasks in this context is to reduce uncertainty. That will be tremendously important as we move into the negotiations. We will enter into those negotiations in a spirit of friendship, but negotiations are not about friends; they are about interests. If we are honest, we need to point out that it will be difficult for the European Union to reach a deal. We would like to see our points at the top of its agenda, but it is a complex organisation with multiple levels of interests and many other issues that affect that agenda. It is important for the EU to signal its intent by giving the UK the opportunity to have a parallel track on a free trade agreement while we are negotiating our exit agreement.

It is also important for the Government to prepare the British public for the sharp choices that we will face in two years' time. That will be important if we are to reduce uncertainty, and the Government must be clear that that is their primary goal. Certain options present themselves. The first, and easiest, involves a transitional agreement, but I would point out that such an agreement is completely different from an extension of the negotiations. A transitional agreement goes towards an agreed objective. An extension just means carrying on talking. Extension maintains uncertainty and is without doubt the worst choice for this country. It is a far worse option than the clean break of going to WTO tariffs, which has been much ridiculed and derided by some in this House. The WTO option would provide certainty. It may be uncomfortable and would certainly need accommodation, and it is worse than a clean, new free trade agreement with Europe, but it is better than maintaining uncertainty. The Prime Minister was right when she said that no deal is better than a bad deal. It is the Government's responsibility to prepare the British public for that option.

10 pm

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller). We sit together on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and his speech was characteristically erudite and thoughtful.

The question asked of the British public in June last year was

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

The public voted to leave. Listening to the debate, both today and in the preceding months, one would imagine that we face a rerun of the same referendum question. We have been told that to vote against the Bill would be an affront to last year's result, but I have read the Bill

—it did not take long—and nowhere does it ask whether we should remain in or leave the European Union. The question we are answering is fundamentally different to that put to the electorate. We need to decide whether our country is ready to begin the process of separation. The referendum result did not tell us when we should leave, the terms upon which we should leave, or what new relationships should replace the existing one. Those are all decisions that the Government and this sovereign Parliament must take.

We are embarking on the most perilous of journeys. The most precious thing our country has—our economy—is being taken to a new place, and yet we have no clarity at all about the destination. I saw at first hand what it took to make our economy great. My dad left school at 14, was in the Navy by 16, and was a door-to-door salesman by his mid-twenties. By the time he reached his 50s, he was a company owner who employed dozens of staff, creating jobs and wealth for my family and our country. I saw what it took: the personal sacrifice, the seven-day working weeks, and the constant travel. By the time he finished, he had built a phenomenal company that imported specialist materials from across Europe and sold them across the UK.

My dad is retired now, but when he asks me, “What does Brexit mean for companies like mine?” the only way I can answer is with, “I don't know.” The truth is that the Government do have a plan for leaving the EU, but it is only a wish list for what comes next. That is not good enough—not for me, not for wealth creators like my dad, and certainly not for the community I represent. All I want is what the Brexit Secretary told us he would deliver. In July last year, he said that

“within two years, before the negotiation with the EU is likely to be complete, and therefore before anything material has changed, we can negotiate a free trade area massively larger than the EU.” We are six months on, but where is the outline of this “free trade area massively larger than the EU”?

Is it not wise to want know what awaits us at the other end of this one-way street before we set off? The Brexit Secretary used to think so and I still do. I will not gamble with my community in the way that this Government are gambling with our economy, which is why I will not be voting for the Bill tomorrow.

Respecting the small majority who voted leave means getting things right, and I have three tests for the city that I represent that must be met before I can in all conscience support the formal process of leaving the EU. In a city with an outward-looking economy and the head offices of American Express and EDF, is it likely after Brexit that talent and goods will be able to travel uninhibited to and from the continent when our local economy demands it? Will our two universities still have visa-free access to students and teachers from EU countries, and will their £10 million of annual EU funding be protected in the long term? And will Brexit have a negative impact on Brighton and Hove's tourism economy, which relies on 8.5 million visitors a year, many from EU countries?

Ever since the referendum, the Government have failed to listen to the concerns of both sides. Many millions of people who voted to remain feel powerless, anxious about the future and ignored. There has been no attempt to reconcile our country and no attempt to bring people together, which is why many people feel that the priorities of the Conservative party are being prioritised over the needs of our country.

[Peter Kyle]

If our EU past is symbolised by rules on the shape of bananas, our future looks increasingly likely to be symbolised by the Prime Minister and Donald Trump holding hands. This is the perfect time to reflect, to engage and to listen more carefully to the people, whether they voted to leave or to remain. Political expediency is pushing this House into a darkness with unstoppable force. It is my belief that, for generations to come, British citizens will wish that we had prioritised getting this right above getting it done fast.

10.5 pm

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great privilege to be called to speak this evening, particularly after so many masterful speeches. I particularly pay tribute to the hon. Members for Ilford North (West Streeting) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), the latter of whom spoke just a few moments ago, for their cogent and clear explanation of the democratic principle that we are all here to represent. Although I, too, campaigned for remain and am a passionate advocate of co-operation with our European partners, I stood on a manifesto that asked the people to give me their delegated power on all matters but one. On that one matter I pledged in the manifesto to hold a referendum. I voted for that referendum and the people told me what they think. The decision has been made.

It is not now for me to tell my commander that he is wrong. It is not now for me to go over the arguments that we have been debating not for six months or a year but for 40 years. It is simply not true to say that this referendum lasted only a few months. Certainly since the beginning of the European Union, or our membership of it, and most particularly since Maastricht, this is a conversation that our country has been having on at least a weekly basis, and frequently on a daily basis.

I find myself today with no choice but to accept the order of my boss, the British people. This morning I had the great privilege of going to one of our great institutions, and walking around the British Museum I was struck by various objects—[*Laughter.*] Sadly there were no claymores. I was struck by various objects, and the most impressive of them was the Franks casket, which those who have studied any archaeology or Anglo-Saxon history will remember is one of the great treasures of 8th-century Northumbria—when the Kingdom of Northumbria was independent, and the Kingdom of Kent, too.

The Franks casket symbolises exactly what we are. It symbolises the fact that we are a union of peoples and that we are a combination of our past and our future, because it is inscribed in runic and in Latin. It has stories of Romans, of Jews and even of pagan Germans, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was particularly struck because, of course, this debate is part of a long, long series of discussions that our country has been having not only with itself but with our community in Europe and the wider world. That conversation is democracy. That conversation is humanity. There is an idea that there is a final part or an end state that we are about to hit—the departure from the European Union or the vote to invoke article 50—but they are not end states in any real sense. We are still going to be part of a European community, because we are 20 miles from the coast

of France. We are still going to be part of a global community, because our cousins live in America, India, Canada and even Zimbabwe. We are part of this international world, so this is not an end state—it is merely a stage. It is our duty to make sure that the next stage, the only one we have any ability to control, is successful.

That is not just down to us and it is not just down to this Chamber, so we must be realistic. When we look at Europe and at the world today, we must realise that although Brexit is important, it is not the only thing that is happening. A French election is coming, and I do not know whether Macron, Fillon or Le Pen is going to win, but that will be seminal. Dutch elections and German elections are coming, and many other decisions will be taken by many other people. Therefore, it is the duty of not only this House, but Her Majesty's Government, our diplomatic corps and our whole Government to be part of that conversation with our friends and neighbours to encourage co-operation.

In that, I simply urge one last thing: when people talk about the reaction of our friends and neighbours—and they are our friends and neighbours—may we please avoid words such as “punishment”? The truth is that all countries and all peoples must act in their national interest, and the decisions they take must be respected. The decisions they will be taking in years to come will not necessarily be punitive; the truth is that they will be taking decisions for themselves, and we must respect them.

10.11 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who has been struck by various objects.

I have to say at the outset that I wholly accept and respect the decision taken on 23 June when the British people voted to leave the EU in principle. They made that choice on a number of grounds—they were told that they would have more money, market access and lower migration—but in fact, as we know, instead of having £350 million a week for the NHS, this will, according to the Chancellor, cost us £300 million a week. We also know that there is going to be another year of austerity. We know that we will not get free market access and that there will be tariffs. On migration, everyone was told that we would shut the door in two years' time, but we know that as a result there has been a huge surge in it. We know that 85% of people over the age of 65 voted to leave, but now they are facing 5% inflation, reducing the value of their savings. People's earnings are going down by 5%. There is going to be another year of austerity and pensioners are going to be hit after 2020. Of course, the young are being hit as well in terms of their opportunities.

I therefore put it to the House that people now feel that they have not had their reasonable expectations fulfilled, which is why, although I accept the vote to leave in principle, I believe there should be a vote—a final say—of the people on the exit package for Britain. Such a vote would allow the people to decide whether that package meets their reasonable expectations and whether it is better than currently being in the EU—if they do not agree, they can stay. The way to facilitate that is, of course, by delaying the triggering of article 50 so that people can have the chance to have the final say.

I know that there is a massive rush to get through article 50, but the simple fact is that it says that after we trigger it, we are, in essence, handing in our EU membership card and then the EU27 will decide our exit package. All this stuff about negotiation is mythical, as we see when we look at article 50. We should not delude ourselves about that. The EU27 will decide. What is more, the key players, France and Germany, are having their elections in May and October. They will not be engaged in the negotiations until October, so article 50 should be delayed until then at least.

Some people say that article 50 can be revoked. There is nothing about revocation in the legislation—that would require the 27 to come together, negotiate and agree. It is a bit like saying, “If I walk down the motorway in the middle of the night, I might not get killed”—it is probably not a good idea to do it in the first place. Basically, it is like having a family argument in which Harry walks off into the garden and then says, “Actually, I’ve decided I want to come back in,” but nobody wants to let him in. This is the moment: the triggering of article 50 is a one-way street to the future.

On the negotiations, the Government are simply throwing away three cards by triggering article 50 on their specific timetable: first, membership; secondly, timing, because if we say we are not going to trigger it now, the EU is more likely to come to the negotiating table; and, thirdly, because if we say there will be a vote on the exit package before we trigger article 50, the EU will know that there is some prospect of our staying in and will come to the negotiating table.

There are those in my party who are concerned that if we do not go ahead with article 50, there will be an immediate election and all the rest of it. My view is that the economy will turn sour when the tariffs kick in, and we will be accountable to the British people. We are moving towards a new situation in which we are turning our back on 44% of our trade—some 56% is already with the rest of the world. The idea is that we go to a country—we can pick one out of thin air—and say, “We want to negotiate with you,” but if they know we are desperate because we are turning our back on the EU, we will get a much worse deal.

As for Trump, in his inauguration speech he complained that countries were ravaging America’s economy, selling their own products, taking America’s jobs and stealing its companies. If anybody on the Government Benches thinks we are going to have a good deal from Trump, they have got something else coming. The Trump Administration will strip away our public services and public health, our environment and our rights at work, because those things will no longer be protected by the European Court of Human Rights. That is the future we face: as some sort of low-tax haven, with low skills and low standards. We will try to get into the European market and rightly be penalised by EU tariffs.

The British people have a right to a final say. We in this House should delay the triggering of article 50 and give them a final chance to make their decision. If the suit does not fit—if it is not what they ordered—they should be able to send it back. If I sold someone a mobile phone and said it did colour photographs when it did only black and white, they should have the right to reject or accept it. People will not be given that right and it is a disgrace. This is not democracy at all. The British people deserve the final say.

10.18 pm

**Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), although I hope that my tone will be a bit more positive than his. I am not entirely sure that I would buy a second-hand motor from him, let alone a mobile phone.

I strongly support the Bill. My support for leaving the European Union was clear, and the view of my constituency was also clear: approximately 60% were in favour of leaving, which is 7.5 percentage points more than the proportion of my constituents who voted for me at the general election. Like me, they voted to take back control of our laws, money and borders. I will vote in favour of the Bill because I believe in respecting the voters and respecting our democracy.

I understand Burke’s argument that as MPs we owe our constituents and the country our judgment, not simply our delegated authority. In 2015, we exercised that judgment overwhelmingly when the House voted that it was the right of the people to decide and that we should hold a referendum. On 23 June last year, each of us got the opportunity to vote with our conscience—on an equal basis with our constituents—at the ballot box. When we vote with our consciences tomorrow, we are voting not on whether we should leave the EU, but on whether we respect democracy and the decision of the people.

This is an admirably simple bill, and I commend Ministers for its clarity. Members on both sides of the House often extol the benefits of simplicity and clarity in legislation. They often say that we should simplify the tax code, close loopholes and simplify the rules around benefits so that they are more easily understood and more equitable, and that we should simplify our many regulations across sectors to cut red tape and reduce burdens on our businesses and individuals. Yet some now complain that this Bill is such a model of simplicity and clarity. Such objections are spurious and misunderstand what this Bill does. We are authorising the Government to take a single action: to carry out the will of the British people.

The debates on treaties such as Maastricht and Lisbon lasted so long because the treaties themselves were long and complex. Each of those treaties ran to some 260 pages. The devil was in the detail, so weeks and weeks were required properly to scrutinise them. As the Prime Minister has stated, not only will we have days and days of debate as negotiations proceed, but the entire body of European law currently applying to Britain will be converted to UK law on our exit from the EU, so each individual item can be scrutinised, amended, repealed or kept as this Parliament sees fit.

Whether we supported remain or leave is no longer relevant, as the UK voted to leave. I hope very much that we all remain passionate supporters of democracy, as we all were when we stood on a manifesto that committed to give the voters this decision. Indications for the negotiations are good. Many countries have expressed a desire for deeper bilateral relations and trade deals with the UK. I understand that, over the weekend, Spain indicated its desire not to be bound by any recalcitrant attitudes that may linger in Brussels. Our Prime Minister has already shown her mettle and great sense in rallying the US behind the NATO alliance.

[Nigel Adams]

We have heard some excellent and incredibly impassioned speeches today. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on the way in which he delivered his speech. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is always eloquent and impassioned. Occasionally he is wrong, but it was great to hear from him. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) made an impassioned plea on behalf of EU citizens who already have citizenship here, and he was absolutely right to do so.

Leaving the EU is an outward-looking process and we should therefore direct our gazes globally, rather than at the innards of procedure. We had a referendum, we had a motion and now we have a Bill. Let us proceed outward and into the world. I look forward to voting for this Bill tomorrow, and I hope that my colleagues do, too.

10.23 pm

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It should come as no surprise that on a day such as today when we commemorate the Clyde revolt, in which my predecessor, the late noble David Kirkwood, was a major participant, I, the Member of Parliament for West Dunbartonshire, am announcing my intention not to vote with the Government tomorrow. Furthermore, as a constituency MP from Scotland, I can think of no greater honour than to follow my fellow Scottish National party Members in voting against article 50.

Like the nation of Scotland, my constituency voted to remain, which is why I am making this contribution. I am mandated by my community and by my nation to do so in the hope that the United Kingdom Government acknowledge and listen to their concerns. Some may refuse to represent and stand up for their remain voting constituents, and instead meekly act as a cheerleader for the United Kingdom Government as they rip my nation out of the European Union without a plan, hellbent on placing my constituents in a precarious position economically, socially and politically. I am proud that the Scottish National party will not behave in such a manner.

During the referendum campaign, those advocating a leave vote spoke of Britain taking back control, yet what we have witnessed is the United Kingdom Government stumbling along with no strategy and no clue. They are losing control and rushing through this Bill in a bid to avoid full parliamentary and public scrutiny. What have they got to hide? Instead of bringing back control to a political state, control and influence have been given to the unelected—not only to that bunch of warmehrs in the House of Lords, but to global corporations that are carrying out dodgy deals with the British Government behind closed doors.

We need look only at the deal involving Nissan to see where control lies. The Government offered support to Nissan and assurances that they would try to secure tariff-free access to the single market, although they have refused to publish the letter containing those remarks. Of course, that was before the British Prime Minister kiboshed the idea of staying in the single market. This is not taking back control. This is giving away power, and the Government need to get their act together before they lose control completely.

In addition, pressure is now mounting on the UK Government from Goldman Sachs to ensure that the City of London is protected from Brexit—more millionaires and billionaires, with no thought given to the impact on the rest of the country, including my constituents. This leadership is steering the economy into a political maelstrom hellbent on wedding us to a flotilla led by a reactionary isolationist who places America first. As we leave the European Union, we seem to be going towards a new pax Americana, in which the United Kingdom might as well be floating off in a cloud of narrow-mindedness, ignorance and intolerance.

Power and increasing influence are being given to those with no political mandate—for the record, for *Hansard*, I should say yet again that that includes that unelected, unaccountable House of warmehrs at the other end of the corridor. Power is being removed from the Parliament of Scotland and its Government, for they are being ignored. It is particularly insulting that that unelected House of Lords will have a greater say on article 50 legislation than the elected institutions of my nation of Scotland, as well as those of Wales and Northern Ireland. So much for a Union of equals!

Let us go back to a critical matter that in times past would have involved more debate in this House and will be affected by Brexit: the position of Northern Ireland. Like many hon. Members, I represent a constituency with a substantial number of the Irish diaspora, reflecting every aspect of Irish society: nationalist, republican and Unionist. Where is the debate? How is this House putting its foot down and demanding that we bring forward legislation through amendments to make sure that the Ireland Act 1949 is not repudiated by the Government of the United Kingdom, undermining the peace process? The issue impacts not only Northern Ireland, but our nearest European neighbour and communities the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. We have silence from the British Conservative party. At least some in the British Labour party have guts and will follow us through the Lobby tomorrow—the less said about their leadership, the better.

10.28 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. As we have just heard, many contributions—there will be more tomorrow—have displayed passion, frustration and at times great thoughtfulness. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias). During her speech, she displayed the challenges she faced in coming to her decision about how she will vote. For many people, that will be indicative of the difficulties and challenges that a debate such as this can create.

One of the first campaigns I fought when I got into politics was to save the pound—something that I felt passionate about then and still do now. I stood as a candidate for our party in the 2010 general election on a manifesto in which the issue of the EU was growing in importance. I failed in that election campaign, but that issue continued to make progress. I was elected in 2015 on a manifesto to give the British people a referendum, which was incredibly important. The country was asking for a referendum, and I heard that message on the doorsteps of Aldridge-Brownhills. The referendum took place on 23 June last year, and there is no going back.

I struggled to decide how to vote in the referendum. I have a background in business, so I know how much

easier it is to trade across open borders, but I also know the frustrations that EU red tape has brought to business. I struggled because I felt in my heart that the security of our country was absolutely paramount, and it still is. I decided that I would vote to remain, but I made it clear to my constituents from the beginning that I would honour the decision of the referendum, whatever it was, because it was the British people's opportunity to have their say, and that is what they did. We can debate which issues led to the decision—immigration, the free movement of people or a whole load of others—but on 23 June, the British people said, "Enough is enough. We want British politicians and the establishment to hear that we want some change." In Walsall borough, 32.14% voted to remain and 67.86% voted to leave. I, for one, respect that decision.

Today we debate a straightforward Bill that is a step forward in the process of exiting the EU. The debate is not about whether we leave, nor is it about whether we should have another referendum. It is about getting on with the job that the British people have asked us to do. There are passions on both sides of the argument, as we have heard today and as was evident during the campaigns. There were times when I found some of the arguments on both sides not just difficult, but quite unpalatable. Some of my constituents found that too. However, now is not the time for recriminations or to rake over the embers of the campaign. Now is the time to respect the will of the majority, but it is also the time to respect both sides of the argument and to come together constructively. The Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street in the summer and talked about bringing together our country. It is incumbent on all of us in the Palace of Westminster to do that and to ensure that we get the best possible deal for future generations.

10.33 pm

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), but it will be no surprise to her that I do not agree with her position. My colleagues and I have arrived at a different destination.

Despite what the Government have claimed, the question facing this House today is not the choice to remain or leave that was faced by the public in the EU referendum on 23 June last year. Rather, it is a question of whether the Government should be given the power unilaterally to reshape the politics of Britain and Northern Ireland with no accountability from Parliament. It is a question of whether the Conservative party should be allowed to lock us out of the single market and into a global race to the bottom. Fundamentally, it is a question of whether a Prime Minister with no personal mandate should be allowed to appoint herself the sole interpreter of last year's referendum result. In my opinion and that of my party, that should not be the case.

The Government have consistently fought against parliamentary scrutiny and accountability on their handling of Brexit. We are glad that that came to an end with the Supreme Court judgment. We have been told that Brexit is simply too important to be subject to the usual scrutiny that we would give to any other Government policy or proposal. On those grounds, the Government have fought to deny devolved institutions substantial input regarding our future post Brexit and avoided answering any questions that might cause the Prime Minister political difficulties.

Now that the Supreme Court has forced the Government to come to Parliament, rather than wake up to their hubris, the Government have made a further mockery of this House by presenting a one-page piece of legislation, with two short clauses, on the most important issue that this Parliament will ever consider during its mandate. The Government have committed themselves to doing the bare minimum that they can legally get away with. After the referendum result that showed the deep divisions across Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government should have sought to ensure special status for Northern Ireland. Instead, the Prime Minister has insisted on imposing uniformity across Britain and Northern Ireland, and introduced an arbitrary timeline intended to minimise opposition. As a result, the Government have put political expediency ahead of getting the right deal in Northern Ireland—even at a time of political instability there.

As I have said before in this House, exit from the European Union poses huge questions for the principles of the Good Friday agreement, because that was built on our continued membership of the European Union, for the border on the island of Ireland, and for our economy. These questions have not been answered previously, and nor have they been answered by Government Members during today's debate. That is why I and my colleagues in the SDLP will vote against the triggering of article 50. Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain within the European Union. My constituency of South Down voted by 67% to remain.

Central to the Good Friday agreement and the peace process it enabled was the commitment that Northern Ireland's constitutional future would be governed by the principle of consent. For many years, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his allies campaigned to the effect that EU membership was the fundamental constitutional question of our times. Now, having got their way in the referendum, the Government seek to deny that exit from the EU will represent any change in our constitutional position in Northern Ireland. Clearly, that is wrong. I accept that membership of the EU is a fundamental constitutional issue. That means that Northern Ireland's place in the EU should be a decision for the people of Northern Ireland alone—it should not become tied into wider questions of national identity or anything else. Nor should EU membership, or lack of it, become an external impediment to the people of Ireland's decision on our own constitutional future.

In the time since the referendum, the Government ought to have worked openly and transparently with the Irish Government, the European Commission and the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive to determine how Northern Ireland's unique circumstances could be accommodated before triggering article 50. Anything less than that is a jump in the dark for us, for all our constituents in Northern Ireland, and for the stability of the devolved institutions. I therefore call on not just the Government but all hon. Members here today to uphold the promise that the British Government made to the people of Northern Ireland and vote against this Bill, as my colleagues and I will do tomorrow evening.

10.39 pm

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate. [*Laughter.*] My predecessor as MP for Newark, William Gladstone, was called by the Speaker to give

[Robert Jenrick]

his maiden speech so late that nobody could remember it. The next time he gave a speech, the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, wrote him a congratulatory note on his maiden speech. I hope that despite the hour, I will be listened to and remembered this evening.

After the storms of the referendum and its immediate aftermath, the country was understandably divided into leave and remain. It seems to me, having listened to 10 hours of this debate, that two new groups have emerged and become the real divide in Parliament. The first, and by far the larger, group consists of those who accept the mandate of the referendum and who want to implement it in full. As many have said tonight, that includes leaving the single market, the customs union and the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. However they voted in the referendum, they are primarily focused on how we can make a success of the life to come.

The second group consists of those who are not yet able to accept the mandate of the referendum, or who do so in word only and seek to diminish it in reality. They look back in anger, remorse and regret, and they are unable psychologically or intellectually to reorientate themselves to the new world and to ask the real question that is before us today: what comes next? In a free society, there is no obligation on anyone to change their views to conform with the majority but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said so eloquently, there is an obligation on all of us to act in the national interest. The path of the second group is not in the national interest.

I do not believe that the people of Newark sent me to Westminster at a time of such historic importance to point fingers—to say, “What about the £350 million for the NHS?” or, “What about the recession that you threatened, which never happened?” They want us to come together. They want us to recognise our moral obligation to make our exit from the European Union succeed. The task of every Member of this House must be to build up the positives of leaving the European Union and to mitigate the negatives. That is the test we must all apply in our lives. Voting against the Bill, or amending it to bind the hands of the Prime Minister in our negotiations, fails that test.

Change can be hard, and even more so if it is a course that we did not want to embark on. But we in this place have a special responsibility to give people the confidence and the courage to live with that change and make a success of it. We do that by accepting the mandate and setting out to find a vision of the future that works for everyone. We have to see this as what an economist—I know that some hon. Members do not like economists—would call a non-zero-sum game. A zero-sum game is one in which one side wins at the expense of the other: leave won, and remain lost. A non-zero-sum game is one in which we try to find a way for everyone to win.

**Alex Chalk:** My hon. Friend is making a characteristically powerful speech. Does he agree that if we are to make this a non-zero-sum game, we have to send the message out as early as possible that EU nationals in our country have got to be part of our shared future in the United Kingdom?

**Robert Jenrick:** I agree with my hon. Friend, who, as ever, is thoughtful and makes the right choices about moving forward as a country. We begin the task of moving forward by accepting the mandate in full and rowing together in the national interest. Finally, in doing so, let us be clear, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset was earlier, that we are taking an irreversible decision. In fact, it was taken for us on 23 June. Like William the Conqueror burning his ships on the beach at Pevensey, we have no choice: we have to make a success of this. All the genius of Parliament and of this country should not be focused on recriminations or petty politics, but on the life of the nation to come.

I have always believed—I was brought up to believe it, and I am teaching my children to believe it—that pessimism and cynicism are cop-outs and self-fulfilling prophecies. Parliament should be in the future business. As a country, we spent the best of my parents’ lives managing decline, until Margaret Thatcher’s Government put a stop to that. I do not intend to spend the best days of my life looking backwards, feeling remorse, talking down the prospects of this country. Unlike what the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) implied, but as the noble Lord Hague would say, some of us will be here in 20 or 30 years’ time, and we intend to make a success of Brexit. As Shakespeare would say, “some have greatness thrust upon them”.

Greatness has been thrust upon each of us in this House and across the country as a result of the referendum, and the only question is how we meet it. As Shakespeare would have finished:

“be not afraid of greatness...Thy Fates open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them.”

10.46 pm

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** We have been told that “Brexit means Brexit”; that the Government will secure the best possible deal; that there will be a red, white and blue Brexit; and, latterly, that we will become a global Britain. Each of those is as enlightening as its predecessor.

We do have some expert information. I know we are not allowed to listen to experts. The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) is not in his place; he is possibly engaged in some more lucrative activity. However, expert information is available in documents such as “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, and “Securing Wales’ Future”—“Sicrhau Dyfodol Cymru”—which was agreed between the Government of Wales and the main Opposition party, which is my party. Careful study of the documents will yield some interesting facts, which I will now mention.

For me in Wales, the most obvious fact is the estimate that we will lose £680 million every year. I pressed the previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, several times to give me a guarantee that that sum would be made up in future—and he of course gave me no such guarantee. We are therefore looking down the barrel of a gun in losing £680 million every year.

What does our exit from the EU mean for Wales? There are people in poor constituencies, including my own, whose communities are so poor that we qualify for European Union cohesion funding. That funding is otherwise made available to former communist regions of eastern Europe, which shows how low the economy of Wales has got under the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We receive EU cohesion funding,

and we are very glad of it. However, that is a poor substitute for a proper UK regional policy. We need a proper UK regional policy, rather than the default position of favouring one region above all others—that is, favouring the south-east. Leaving the EU does not mean going back to some comfortable status quo ante. When we do eventually leave the EU, we will insist that this Government or any future Government adopt a proper regional policy.

What does exit mean for other sectors in Wales, such as manufacturing, agriculture and our universities, including my own in Bangor, which benefits greatly from the European Union and has very strong links across the Irish sea with universities in Ireland? What about worker protection and environmental protection? What about the future of multiculturalism and multilingualism in this state? All these questions are extremely important to us.

What does exit mean for democratic accountability within these islands, and for the constitutional settlement? Leaving the EU is not just a matter of leaving the EU; it has profound implications for the constitutional set-up in the United Kingdom itself. I am sure the Government realise that they are not only dealing with the hugely complex matter of leaving the EU, but risking the severest possible implications for the continuation of the UK as it is.

For those reasons alone, we should have the fullest possible debate. I say that in particular to people who voted, sincerely and in good faith, to leave the EU, thinking it was a straightforward matter. They were assured by the experts that it was simply a matter of pulling the plug and it would all be decided very quickly on the basis of a very attractive prospectus. I will not refer this evening to the promises made, not least the £350 million a week for our NHS, as they are matters for future detailed debates. However, I refer the House to my new clauses 58 to 75, which deal with some of the promises made by the leave side. I look forward to expert responses from the other side explaining how those promises are not to be fulfilled. To those good people who think that it is all done and dusted, I have to say that this will be a marathon and not a dash.

Since 24 June 2016, we in Plaid Cymru have been clear and consistent in our approach as to a preferred model for a United Kingdom outside the EU. Our concern is Wales's national interests, of course, and that means prioritising the economy. That means ensuring full and unfettered access to our important European markets. For no matter how many "special relationships" the Prime Minister scrapes with other countries, or bespoke deals she eventually strikes, I fear we will not enjoy the same levels of free trade if we leave the EU single market.

We already know that uncertainty means businesses are pulling out of investing in Wales and that confidence is low. We cannot afford the luxury of time. Canada's deal took 10 years and TTIP is in trouble. We cannot afford the luxury of time waiting for a WTO deal to be struck, because that will be far from unproblematic. Some 200,000 jobs in Wales are supported by our trade with the single market, with 90% of our food and drink exports going to our EU partners.

I will finish on this point. If our agriculture, which is the backbone of rural Wales, is threatened in this way, what future is there for us? What future is there for my

culture and my language? I will ask one question. It is a rhetorical question, but I look forward to an answer from across the way on the Government Benches and perhaps from the Labour Front Bench. It is a very short and simple question: how much lamb can we possibly hope to sell to New Zealand?

10.52 pm

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams).

This House was right to decide in 2015, with just 53 votes to the contrary, that an in/out referendum should determine Britain's continued membership of the EU. The referendum was the biggest exercise in democracy since the 1992 general election. The majority voted to leave and this House, this seat of democracy, would set a worrying precedent by frustrating that result tomorrow.

When I went into the polling station with my wife on 23 June, I did so knowing, as I had told many voters in the previous days and weeks, that our votes would count and that it was important to vote. It was important because there would be no going back and the result of the referendum would settle the question of whether or not we remained in the EU. Ironically, given the position of his party today, it was the leader of the Liberal Democrats who said:

"there is one thing on which I can agree with the Leave campaign: This is a once-in-a-generation decision."

The very high turnout in the referendum suggests that that is what the majority of people understood.

For all the arguments advanced now about binding and advisory referendums, not one person told me that they voted on 23 June thinking that Parliament might override the result at some later stage. They were right to have that confidence, because that is what they were told by multiple sources: the Conservative manifesto; the Government's official referendum leaflet; the leave campaign; the remain campaign; and leaders of political parties. In those circumstances, it would be unconscionable to block the result of the referendum. As the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said in a powerful speech, that is simply not an option.

We are being urged to go back on those clear averments, by a minority of people—and I think by a minority of people who voted to remain—who want to find a way to block a result that they, like me, find disappointing. I want to explain why I disagree with the four main arguments they make.

**Nicky Morgan:** Is it not ironic that the Liberal Democrats, whose second name is "Democrats", want to block the democratic decision—much though I disagreed with it—taken last June?

**James Berry:** That point is not lost on me or the House.

The first objection is that MPs in constituencies said to have voted remain are obliged to respect the result in their constituency and block article 50. We are told that we should act not as representatives in the sense that Burke instructed but as delegates. There are several problems with that argument. The first is that the referendum was a straightforward exercise in direct democracy applicable to the UK as a whole. The rules

[James Berry]

were not for a two-stage electoral college process including a vote in this House. If those had been the rules, the votes would have had to be counted on a constituency basis, which they certainly were not in England—it is likely that my constituency voted to remain, but we will never know. In practice, had those been the rules, it is estimated that the leave campaign would have won by a country mile—by more than 2:1. To get around this inconvenience, a second main argument is advanced: that all those MPs in seats that voted to remain should vote to block article 50 anyway in the national interest. To those arguments, I simply say: you cannot have your cake and eat it.

The third main argument, reflected in one of the amendments—one with which I respectfully disagree—is that the referendum gave no mandate to leave the single market. Whatever else can be said about the leave campaign—and I have a lot to say about the leave campaign—it was certainly clear about taking back control of immigration policy, laws and EU spending, none of which would be possible as a member of the single market. EU leaders said it at the time, leave campaigners said it, remain campaigners absolutely said it, and I know I said it, because staying in the single market was one of the main reasons I voted remain, knowing what a leave vote would entail.

The fourth main argument is that MPs who like me voted to remain have a duty to hold fast with that view and vote to block article 50: we were convinced that the best thing for the country was to remain in the EU last June, so what has changed? I say nothing has changed. I made a careful decision, having considered the arguments on both sides, and decided that it was in the best interests of my constituents, many of whom work in the City of London, and of the country to remain in the EU. I recognise, however, one straightforward fact: my side lost. We in the House are nothing else if not democrats. The democratic process of the referendum, set in train by a vote in this House, has run its course and delivered its result, and in this country, we respect the results of the democratic process.

A good number of my constituents who voted to remain have in the last few days and hours asked me to vote to block article 50. They will be disappointed by my vote on the Bill. I respect their views, I understand their desire to remain a member of the EU and I share their concerns about the uncertainty inherent in the article 50 process, but the consistently high turnouts in my constituency tell me that my constituents care about democracy. The majority of my constituents, and the majority of the people in the UK, would not expect their MP to try to obstruct the result of a democratic process just because that MP was on the side that lost.

I have come to the clear conclusion that the right thing to do—indeed, the only thing to do—as a democrat is to accept the result of the referendum, to avoid prolonging this damaging uncertainty and to focus on arguing for what I think is the best relationship with the EU once we have left, both for my country and my constituents. For me, that means the closest possible relationship with the EU consistent with the referendum result, and it means a liberal, tolerant, outward-looking, internationalist Britain that leads the world in free trade, the rule of law, the fight against terrorism, international development,

research and innovation and environmental protection, all in close co-operation with our EU friends and allies. That was the positive vision set out by the Prime Minister in her Lancaster House speech, and she has my full support in seeking to deliver it, but she can do so only if we vote to trigger article 50 tomorrow—the inevitable and required result of the EU referendum.

10.59 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), although I fear that we do not agree. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to explain to the House why, although I respect the position taken by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and agree with him that this is a very difficult matter, I will be voting against the Bill on Second Reading tomorrow.

My constituents voted overwhelmingly—by more than 75%—to remain in the EU last June. Across the country, almost half of those who voted, voted to remain in the EU, and a further 27% of the population did not vote at all. During the campaign, the leave campaign made a series of commitments, on the basis of which many people voted. The most significant was the pledge of an additional £350 million a week for our NHS. On other issues, however, there was a complete lack of clarity—for example, about whether leaving the EU would mean an end to freedom of movement and retained access to the single market. The vagueness and undeliverability of those commitments unravelled almost immediately. The narrow referendum result, on a question that contained no detail about what Brexit would mean and informed by a debate that was full of false promises and inconsistencies, does not provide a mandate to the Government on any terms, within any time scale or at any cost.

There are three things that are important to me as we debate our future relationship with the European Union. The first is the values that matter to the communities that I represent. Many of my constituents feel a profound sense of distress at the referendum result. They are concerned about the serious practical implications, but they are also concerned about the implications for the values that are important to them. These are values of internationalism, tolerance and diversity; of working closely and collaboratively with countries that share our values and standing up to those who do not; and of celebrating the contribution that people from all over the world make in our communities and our economy. We share so much with the other nations of Europe, yet we see our Prime Minister cut adrift, failing to establish the relationships with other EU leaders that are necessary to secure the best possible outcomes for the UK in the Brexit negotiations.

We see our Prime Minister so desperate to secure trading relationships outside the EU that she has apparently lost any moral compass at all in our relationship with the US. Let me be clear: the people of Dulwich and West Norwood do not share Donald Trump's values. We do not believe that the world can be made safer by excluding people based on their religion or nationality. We condemn torture and human rights abuses. We do not believe in abolishing environmental protections or denying climate change. We do not believe in limiting access to healthcare for the most disadvantaged groups;

nor do we believe in the denigration of women, disabled people and Muslims, or the appointment of white supremacists to high office or, indeed, any office. Without the European Union, we are left with far fewer close international partners who share our values and we are diminished in many ways as a consequence.

My second concern is about the terms of the proposed exit. A narrowly won referendum does not give the Government a mandate to exit the EU on any terms or within any time scale. It does not give a mandate for a reckless hard Brexit, which will put our economy at risk and which makes no attempt to reconcile the country and build bridges to the 48%. The detail matters, and the detail is complex—on the rights of EU nationals living in the UK, which I have asked the Government to confirm several times in this House; on our access to the single market; on the status of the many protections for our environment, workers' rights, equalities and human rights; and on the implications for science and our universities.

The detail matters, and we have a right to know and to have the opportunity to debate what the Government propose Brexit will look like and what its implications will be. This is a decision that will define our country for a generation. It will directly affect what life is like for our children and grandchildren and for communities across the country. It should be undertaken carefully, rigorously and with attention to every aspect of the detail. We must know what the Government's negotiating objectives are and have the opportunity to have a say on whether they will deliver a secure, stable and prosperous future for the UK.

Twelve bullet points of a speech, a two-clause Bill and less than a week of debate are completely unacceptable. The Government should be publishing their White Paper ahead of the legislation and should be setting out in detail how they propose to secure a Brexit deal that safeguards the things that matter most to our communities, and we should have the opportunity to debate and vote before an irrevocable step to trigger article 50 is taken.

Finally, the electoral promises made during the referendum campaign matter, and the Government, in acting on the referendum result, must be held to account for delivering them. My constituents are overwhelmingly opposed to Brexit, but our NHS trust is in crisis, and as a result of decisions made by the coalition Government, my constituents and I want to know how much of the promised additional £350 million a week will be allocated to our services and when the money will be available. If the Government cannot deliver this additional funding in an open and transparent way, they must be clear with the British people about this broken promise, and the many millions of people who voted on the basis that a vote for leave was a vote for their local NHS services should have the opportunity to have their say again. I cannot vote to give the Government a blank cheque on Brexit, or to allow the Government to pursue Brexit as quickly as possible, no matter what the cost. I cannot vote to trigger article 50 on the basis of a single speech from the Prime Minister.

11.5 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): On 23 June, the British people were presented with a simple choice. In my constituency of Boston and Skegness, 76% voted to leave the European Union—more than in any other seat in the country. While that choice on the

referendum ballot might have been simple, it covered a multitude of issues, some of which I would like momentarily to unpack.

We talked in the constituency of Boston and Skegness at great length about what it would mean to control immigration. We talked at great length about that one single issue—not to the exclusion of all others, but certainly more than any other issue. While I agree with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends that much of this debate was about taking back control of our laws and our money, it is disingenuous to pretend that immigration was not—certainly in my constituency and many others—the single key issue on which many made their decision to vote one way or another.

Let me make two key points on immigration. First, if we are to control our borders, we must leave the single market. To those who say that leaving the single market was not on the ballot paper, I say it absolutely was to anyone who was having the conversations in my constituency. From talking to others about the vital new relationship Britain would have going out into the world after we left the European Union, I know that it meant making our own bilateral trade deals with countries. That means leaving the customs union. It absolutely was on the ballot paper.

The sophisticated, in-depth and detailed debates in the run-up to 23 June were on the deal that the Prime Minister now proposes to take us through over the coming two years. When it is said in some quarters that this negotiation is a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit or some kind of Brexit that people do not like, that is patronising the electorate, who knew exactly what they were doing and who chose to make a new relationship with the world.

We might have a simple Bill today, but it stems from a complex debate that led to a very simple question. That question was resoundingly answered in my constituency, and I suspect it will come as no surprise to anyone when I say that I will vote with the Government to trigger article 50 tomorrow.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** My hon. Friend and I, both representing Lincolnshire, were on opposite sides of this argument in the referendum campaign. It was easy enough for me to go with my constituency, but I think the House views my hon. Friend's stance as a courageous one, and I think he is respected for what he is telling us now.

**Matt Warman:** That is a kind comment from my constituency neighbour—it is either courageous or bonkers, but we will leave that to the voters to decide in 2020. As I say, I hope that whatever we do in this House, we are rewarded for sticking to what we believe, and that brings me to my second fundamental point.

**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I believe that more Poles live in my hon. Friend's constituency than in any other constituency. Does he accept that the free movement of people has also been bad for countries such as Poland, which have seen a massive brain drain as highly skilled workers have left, and that the system was wholly unsustainable?

**Matt Warman:** I entirely agree. I think that, throughout Europe, we are seeing a recognition that the free movement of people does not work for a host of countries, for a

[*Matt Warman*]

host of reasons. That, I think, is why the rights of workers in my constituency should be protected, but it is also why we should acknowledge that free movement needs fundamental reform.

The central point I want to make is that there has been a sense—not over the last 18 months or over the period of the referendum campaign, but over the last 40 years—that the policies promoted by Westminster have become ever more remote from constituencies such as mine. There has been an increasing sense that there is not consent for the kind of free movement to which my hon. Friend has referred, and that there is not consent for the kind of relationship that we have had with our European neighbours. We all want free trade, but not everyone wants the kind of free movement that we have seen. The social changes that it has wrought on small market towns such as Boston are not something for which the people voted at any point, and that disconnect has fundamentally diminished the reputation of this House, of politics, and of politicians throughout the country.

What we have today, and what we will have in the vote tomorrow, is an opportunity to take a small step towards restoring some of the faith in this place. What we have is an opportunity to demonstrate to the British people that after the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, promised that we would deliver a referendum, the House kept that promise, and that now the House will deliver on what the referendum mandated us to do. It is only through politicians keeping their promises that we will do the greater thing, which is to seek and, I believe, to achieve the restoration of some kind of faith in politics as the sole means to make our country better.

There are those who say that to vote with one's conscience is to suggest that one knows better than one's constituents. I know that there are some issues on which we are asked to make decisions on behalf of our constituents, because there has been no referendum on every Bill, but in this case there has been a very clearly expressed view from each and every one of our constituents, and it appeared to me that that very clearly expressed view was a wish for us to trigger article 50. I accept that there are other views, but when it comes to voting with my conscience, my conscience tells me not only that I should trigger article 50, but that if I do anything else I shall risk undermining not just faith in this party and not just faith in this Parliament but faith in democracy itself. I do not believe that I could vote with my conscience and do that shameful thing, and I am not sure that many others in the House would seek to do it either.

11.13 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in a debate that the Government strained every sinew to prevent. I rise to oppose the motion, and to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), supported by my hon. Friends and, now, Members in all parts of the House.

It is not just because my constituency voted remain that I oppose the Government, although, as the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) has just explained so eloquently, that is an important consideration for any Member. It is not just because

every local authority area in Scotland voted remain that I oppose the Government. It is not even just because 62% of the Scottish people voted remain that I oppose the Government. Tonight, I am opposing this Government's vision of Brexit Britain and the flawed process taking us there. It would be one thing if we were to see attempts by the British Government to achieve a united position on Brexit among the four nations, but instead we have unilateral decisions on leaving the single market, and we see the British Government taking a political decision not to consult the devolved Governments on the terms of this Brexit Bill.

The Supreme Court deemed that the UK Government are not legally compelled to consult the devolved Governments on the Bill, which makes an absolute folly of the 2014 independence referendum promises and the Scotland Bill promises of the year before last. The Sewel convention is no longer worth the paper it is written on. Sewel is now a political choice for this Government, and it is a choice they can and should still take. If they will not formally consult the devolved Parliaments on this, the most important of constitutional changes that has such a profound impact on areas of devolved responsibility—if they will not formally consult the Scottish Parliament on Brexit—what will they consult us on?

There were a great many predictions before the Scottish independence referendum about the outcome of a yes vote or a no vote: one has been confirmed today, and one has been rubbished today. Some said that, if we vote no, we give the UK Government *carte blanche* to treat Scotland as they wish—to kick us down the road and discard our views on the issues that matter to the people of Scotland but are the responsibility of this place. How long will the people of Scotland be willing to accept this treatment? I tell the Government that it will not be very much longer.

The other promise, which was absolutely rubbished today, is that voting no meant we kept our place in the EU. Voting no has in fact forced Scotland out against its will. It would be one thing if we were to see a respect shown for the people who voted remain in Scotland and a middle ground sought, but instead we see a unilateral decision to leave the single market and a unilateral decision to pursue a hard Tory Brexit, whatever the cost.

As a result, we see a desperate and pandering appeasement of a US President who has been roundly condemned by other liberal leaders around the world. While Justin Trudeau, Angela Merkel and our own Nicola Sturgeon have taken a lead in calling out Trump's disgraceful actions of the past week, the British Prime Minister literally and figuratively holds the hand of the man who wants to build walls, persecute people of Islamic faith and leave those fleeing persecution in destitute limbo. This is where the Tory vision of Brexit Britain is leading us: cutting ourselves off by choosing to leave the single market, and desperate to do deals, at whatever cost to our principles and our reputation in the world, on human rights, religious freedoms and tolerance.

That is not a vision that I have for my country. I want better than that for Scotland, and indeed for the rest of the UK. I, like everyone else, want the best possible outcome from the precarious position in which the former Prime Minister's referendum gamble has put us.

We are leaving the EU, and in that regard I respect the result of the referendum and those who chose to vote as they did. But there is no doubt that the Government's chosen path means that our precarious position is getting ever closer to the edge of the cliff that is so often spoken about. So, to paraphrase the wonderful comment from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) earlier, I will be voting against the Government with my conscience clear.

11.18 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): Mr Speaker, you have taken me completely by surprise. I know it is traditional to be called this late. I am given an hour to speak, so I am delighted with that. You told me it would be a miracle if I was allowed to speak, but here I am speaking, and it is a great honour to do so.

There have been some excellent speeches right across the House, and, contrary to what some Opposition Members may think, I do respect the remain view. However, I urge all those who still wish to stay in the EU to realise that we are not going to do that. The decision has been made; it is final, and I want—I know that everyone in the country wants—our country to stay together, and to go forward together, as a United Kingdom, to a very exciting new future. *[Interruption.]* I am absolutely convinced—and I know the people of Scotland are, funnily enough—that that is the way, together, to tackle all the challenges that lie ahead. *[Interruption.]* I am hearing lots of commentary from SNP Members. May I suggest that they learn to use the powers that they have been given properly? Then, when they have done that, perhaps they can come back here and start talking a little bit more sense—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The more jocularity there is, the greater the danger that Members who want to speak tonight will not do so, not for disciplinary reasons but because we will run out of time. So please, in your own interests, cut it out.

**Richard Drax:** I want to pick up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), whom I respect and who is no longer in his place. He used the analogy of someone checking that they had a parachute before jumping out of a plane. I believe that the reason we are leaving the aeroplane—whether we check the parachute or not—is that it is on fire. The EU as it now stands—the political experiment that was put in place—is over. It is finished, and the people of Europe are beginning to realise that. The British people have led the way, and others are now seeing the light. I hope that where the United Kingdom leads, others will follow.

I hope for a peaceful and ordered change for Europe, which we all love. We love Europe, and we want to remain friends and allies with it. If we look back in history, I think we will find that Britain has been the best ally that certain countries in Europe could ever have hoped to have. The future for us in this country and our European allies will be sound. I have used the example of Airbus on many occasions, and I will use it again tonight. The fuselages are built in Germany and France, and the wings are built in Wales and Bristol. It is a fantastic European enterprise, and I cannot imagine any sane, sensible politician or bureaucrat wanting to

get in the way of all those thousands of jobs. I believe that, over the next two years, the EU will come to us. It will see the pragmatism of having a future with us that involves sensible trade and friendship resulting in the prosperity and wealth of us all. In fact, I have no doubt about that whatever.

Many Members have talked about their fear of what we will do when we become our own country again and when we take control of our destiny, which we have not had for 40 years.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there should be no veto from any region of the United Kingdom over the democratically expressed opinion that all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland should leave? Does he also agree that article 50 should be invoked by 31 March and that no region should say no to that?

**Richard Drax:** I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we are here tonight, and it is what the vote will be about tomorrow. We are all going to vote to trigger article 50. We will then have at least two years of negotiations to find out exactly where we are going to be. Who knows, that might take even longer, but I have every confidence in our Government and in our Prime Minister, who could not have been clearer about the direction in which this country is going. She has said that no deal is better than a bad deal, and I entirely endorse that view. If we have to fall back on WTO rules, so be it, but I am convinced that common sense and pragmatism will ensure, over the next two years, that that will not happen.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend talks about pragmatism. Given our huge imbalance of trade with the European Union, does he agree that it would be hugely in the EU's interests to strike a better deal with us rather than reverting to WTO rules?

**Richard Drax:** I have already mentioned Airbus, and I cannot think of a better example. It would be crazy for politicians—

**Claire Perry:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Richard Drax:** I am afraid that I cannot give way. I know that other people want to speak. I would love to give way to my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* All right, I will give way to her—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. To put it bluntly, may I suggest that the hon. Gentleman gets on with it? Get on with it, man!

**Richard Drax:** I was giving way to my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* Right, okay, so I cannot give way to her. Forgive me.

Many Members have talked about the fear of losing workers' rights, money and all the other things that EU gives us and our regions. I long to hear the Government Front-Bench team say to those people, "What about our £200 million, our £60 million or our £50 million?" That is our money. When we leave the EU, we will have a sovereign Parliament and it will decide where that money will go. We will lobby Government—whomever

[Richard Drax]

they may be—for our good causes and use the money raised by the taxpayer sensibly. Every country should be allowed to do that.

I cannot understand those who ask about workers' rights. We live in one of the oldest and proudest democracies in the world. If we cannot decide what rights workers should have, then God help us. Why do we need tens of thousands of bureaucrats to tell us how to run our country? We do not need them. I fear that the vitality of this great country of ours has somehow been sucked out over the past 40 years or so. We live in a welfare state with handouts that are our money. The whole thing could not be more ironic. The future is about common sense, pragmatism and negotiation, which I am convinced the Government will do well on our behalf, leading to a prosperous country that will at last have control of her destiny, with all the decisions that govern our lives being made in this place.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The limit will now be four minutes per speech. I am afraid that that is the reality of the matter. People can intervene on each other if they want, but that will just stop other people getting in.

11.26 pm

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): In following the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), I have to say that I will not be one of those who will be patronised into the confidence and comfort that he thinks awaits us in this somewhere-over-the-rainbow picture that we are being painted of where the Brexit course will lead us. The fact is that the Bill in front of us is short. There is more substance in the reasoned amendments—even those that have not been selected—than in the Bill itself, but that does not mean that it is not pregnant with serious implication. That is why it is bizarre to see in the explanatory notes statements such as

“The Bill is not expected to have any financial implications.”

Tell that to the households that will lose money over the years ahead. Tell that to the many regions that will lose access to vital European funding and programmes. Tell that to the universities and to people working in research in our health service who will be denied access to European consortium funding.

Paragraph 14 of the explanatory notes states:

“The impact of the Bill itself will be both clear and limited, therefore mechanisms for post legislative scrutiny are not necessary.”

Clear and limited? A whole series of amendments have already been tabled for next week that are all about ensuring more scrutiny, getting proper answers about the processes that are afoot and getting the Government to take due heed of several key principles and priorities that must be borne in mind as this course is pursued.

Paragraph 16 tells us:

“Given the need to introduce legislation as quickly as possible, it has not been possible to formally discuss with Parliamentary Committees.”

There was plenty of time to introduce this legislation, but the Government and those on the Government Benches were in denial about legislation being necessary. They were saying that this matter could be pursued with no scrutiny in this Parliament and with no scrutiny by

or say-so from the devolved Assemblies—it would be left entirely in the hands of the Executive under the royal prerogative.

I agreed with a point made by one Government Member who will be voting to trigger article 50. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) said that he wants the “best relationship with the EU...both for my country and my constituents.” That is what I want and that is what my colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) and for South Down (Ms Ritchie), want, too. The best relationship with the EU for my country of Ireland—my Unionist neighbours and their constituents would say Northern Ireland—would be one in which we can continue to enjoy access not only to EU funds, but to the other benefits of EU membership, which are built into the workings of the Good Friday agreement.

I remind the House yet again that, when the Good Friday agreement was negotiated, the common EU membership of Britain and Ireland was taken as a given and was written into the terms of the agreement between the two Governments—it is written into strand 1, strand 2 and strand 3—so we want to make sure that in future there is a special status for Northern Ireland so that we can enjoy a lean-to position with the south on the benefits of the EU and access to the single market.

That is why the whole question of membership of the single market and the implications of the customs union has to be spelled out by the Government and tested by this Parliament, and it is why we will be tabling a number of amendments to see whether the lip service that the Government are paying to the Good Friday agreement actually means anything. We cannot just accept the simple lip service that they mean no harm to the Good Friday agreement and have others lip synching along with that lip service as though it offers us any sort of reassurance or protection.

11.30 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): At a point in history when international co-operation has never been more important, I believe that as a nation we would benefit from being a member of a collaborative organisation like the EU, but the EU took a calculated gamble when Britain asked to renegotiate its terms of membership. The proposed reforms did not address the fundamental concerns of the British people, so voters made their voices heard; we have to accept that.

The priority now has to be to set aside our differences to get the best for our country, our constituents and, indeed, the thousands of businesses that make our country a great place to live. We are a great nation with great people and a Government who have a firm and optimistic view for our country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) is right that we have to use our judgment on whether the Bill is the right approach, and it is my judgment that, by amending their process and presenting this Bill, the Government have demonstrated that they understand the rule of law and the democratic process, and I support the Bill because of that.

The country has voted to leave the EU, and the Bill starts that process. I welcome the Government's announcement that the Bill will be followed by a White Paper to be published shortly. Although it is vital that the Government have the mandate of this place for their

approach—the mandate will come from the White Paper, from this Bill and from the great repeal Bill—this is not the forum to negotiate the specific terms of any agreement.

Of course we want to know the terms of engagement and the strategy that will be followed, but to bind the Government's hands would be sheer folly. Negotiations are, by definition, a series of trade-offs, and we must not bind the Government's hands, which would result in a much worse deal for our country. Frankly, accountability is baked into our system—it is called the 2020 general election. The Prime Minister has clearly set out a very positive vision for our future, putting at the centre of her approach control of our laws, control of immigration and clear rights for EU nationals in the UK and British nationals in the EU. I have spoken to EU nationals living in my constituency, and I think it would be right for the UK and the remaining EU states to resolve the matter of British and EU nationals as soon as possible because giving them certainty as quickly as possible is fundamental to who we are as a nation.

The Government have also been clear about the importance of fully protecting and maintaining workers' rights by translating the body of European law into domestic regulations. The Government have also been clear about giving priority to protecting everybody's rights and treating people equally and fairly, regardless of their gender, race, religion, disability, sexuality or age not because we are a member of the EU but because it is a fundamental part of who we are. Much of those protections is already enshrined in UK law but as a respected lawyer, the Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who will respond to this debate, knows that the law itself is not sufficient. We need to disentangle 50 years of institutional collaboration on enforcing those laws—I believe that leaving the European Court of Justice behind is a must, although it will create new tensions—if we are not to see the erosion of the protections that we all hold dear. I hope he can indicate that he will be looking at that in the White Paper.

Time is short, but I reiterate that we are not leaving Europe, we are leaving the EU. We are not changing our values of fairness and decency.

11.34 pm

**Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): This hard Tory Brexit has unknown ramifications, but we in Scotland know one thing: it will be painful. Bitter experience tells us that. My constituency faces its local industry being decimated by the UK leaving the EU. Last year, prior to the referendum, Müller, the Germany dairy producer, announced it would be investing an additional £15 million in its Bellshill plant. The single market means that its imported ingredients are tariff-free, helping to keep production costs down. Likewise, the single market means that Scottish exports to the EU are tariff-free, which helps to keep consumer prices down and encourages growth. My constituency has faced years of deprivation because of Thatcherism and de-industrialisation. The growing Scottish food and drinks industry has provided new hope, but we again face decline as a result of short-sighted Tory policy and a looming hard Tory Brexit. I have heard several Members quote Edmund Burke and I remind all of them of this quote, which I most associate with the Scottish and European referendums:

“The people never give up their liberties but under some delusion.”

That is the real reason behind both referendum results.

I hold in my left hand the Bill, this poor excuse of a sick note. It is what the Westminster Government have produced in seven months by way of an explanation to the people of the UK of what a hard Tory Brexit means. Let us contrast that with what I hold in my right hand: the Scottish Government's considerably compromised proposal to Westminster. As befits of an equal partner in a difficult negotiation, where due consideration must be given to the other party's position, compromise is involved. I say that for the benefit of those on the Government Benches, who perhaps need it spelled out to them. It is therefore only fit and proper that the House, and in particular the Government, consider this document, “Scotland's Place in Europe”, and fully engage as an equal partner with the Scottish Government on how to get the best Brexit outcome for Scotland and the UK as a whole.

I shall highlight some of the key points as best as I can, although time does not permit me to go into this as deeply as I would like. We in the Scottish National party concur with those who believe that the leave prospectus put forward during the referendum was deeply flawed. The lack of preparation for leaving done by those responsible for that campaign remains a deeply damaging aspect of the current constitutional crisis. The lack of any plan seven months after the vote illustrates perfectly that the Brexiteers were the dog that finally caught the bus; having done so, they had no clue what to do with it and no plan for implementation. This situation is not of the SNP's making. It has been caused by the original flawed decision to hold an EU referendum and the fact that the vote to leave was the result of England and Wales voting leave.

The contents of the Scottish Government's paper represent a significant compromise by them. I hope the Prime Minister is listening and that she learns from this great example of strong, informed and communicative leadership. This is what transparency looks like when there is a plan. The paper sets out the Scottish Government's vision of the best Brexit outcome for the whole of the UK. It presents evidence of the negative impact of any other approach on the economic and social prosperity of Scotland and, by extension, the UK as a whole. Again, we can contrast the Scottish Government's document with the UK Government's document. This Bill—this sick note for seven months of absentee governance in respect of a clear, evidence-based Brexit plan—is a joke.

The Westminster Government would do well to take a leaf from the Scottish Government's Brexit plan. In fact, they should not take one leaf of “Scotland's Place in Europe”—they should take all 50.

11.38 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Parliamentary sovereignty has exercised and excited a lot of Government Members today. The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) asked who governs this country and said that the Bill answers that question. The Bill does not give Parliament the power to trigger article 50; it gives power to the Prime Minister. It does not give power to Cabinet Ministers collectively or to the Crown in Parliament; it gives the person of the Prime Minister the power to decide, on her own initiative, when article 50 will be triggered. There is no sunset clause and no sunrise

[Patrick Grady]

clause, and there are no further checks or balances. This is not a parliamentary power; it is almost a presidential power—I wonder where she might have got a taste for that from.

This is only a taste of things to come, because those Government Members who think that sovereignty is somehow being reinvested in this Parliament are kidding themselves—they should wait until the great repeal Bill is published to see that. All the hated regulations on straight bananas and electric lightbulbs that so frighten the Brexiteers on the Government Benches will not be amended by primary legislation. It will be the sweeping powers of statutory instruments and Henry VIII provisions that the Executive will take for themselves in the great power grab. The sovereignty that people thought they were voting for is going to disappear like the wick in a candle.

In Scotland, our tradition is one of popular sovereignty, so I accept that 22% of my constituents—we did get a breakdown by constituencies in Scotland—voted to leave the European Union, but they did not vote for the hard Tory Brexit that is now being proposed. At the same time, 78% of my constituents voted to remain in the European Union, which is why I will proudly support the Scottish National party's reasoned amendment in the Division Lobby tomorrow evening. Nobody in Scotland voted to leave the single market; that was not even in the Conservative party's manifesto.

Everything we were warned would happen if Scotland became independent now appears to be happening under the Tory Brexiteer vision of independence: the currency is collapsing; our holidays will be more expensive; and we will not get access to medicines. The Fraser of Allander Institute warns that 80,000 jobs are at risk in Scotland as a result of the hard Tory Brexit.

There is now a choice of two futures: the progressive, internationalist, outward-looking vision for Scotland that my party has always promoted; or Trident, Trump and the transatlantic tax haven that the Tories now seek to take forward. There is no White Paper, so we are being asked to sign a blank cheque. People might think that they are taking back control, but they should be careful what they wish for, because if this Government can ride so roughshod over Scotland's popular sovereignty, parliamentary sovereignty will be next.

11.41 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): There is no question but that our coming out of the single market will have an economic impact. My constituency has a major aerospace contingent and the complex supply chains that snake across Europe will be affected. People here talk about freedom of movement as a bad thing, but we should remember that for the people trapped behind the iron curtain and the Berlin wall, it was incredibly precious.

In this country, EU nationals contribute to our communities and public services. Some 130,000 of them are health and social care workers—doctors, nurses and the people who might be looking after our relatives. The Nursing and Midwifery Council has reported a 90% fall in nurse registrations from Europe since last July. That is going to affect England, which has a nurse vacancy rate of almost 10%.

We, too, benefit from freedom of movement. We get to travel, settle, work or study anywhere we like in the EU. Key to doing that is the possibility of our moving our social protection and healthcare rights with us, so if we work and live in the EU in the long term, we qualify like any other citizen. If we are there for less than two years, as a student or traveller, we take our European health insurance card, which we also take on holiday. For pensioners, there is an S1 form. More than a quarter of a million of them are using those forms in France and Spain, which means that they have guaranteed healthcare like any other citizen. Even if they are given the right to remain in the EU but lose the right to free healthcare, some of them might have to come back, which will put pressure on this country.

We are not looking at the benefits we have gained from agencies such as the European Medicines Agency, which I have mentioned at Prime Minister's questions. It has given us quicker access to drugs than other markets. The EMA also drives research into rare and ultra-rare diseases. Combined with Horizon 2020, it has made the EU the biggest research network in the world, but that works only if there is freedom of movement for academics, and we should be aware that some of them are already leaving this country.

We have benefited from environmental improvements in water and air quality, and from food and safety controls that might now be under threat from a free trade deal that our Prime Minister will have gained by grovelling to the most appalling man in the western world, the new President of America. We might all have to go vegetarian if we want to avoid chlorine-washed chicken and hormone-fed beef. Exactly what will be the impact on our NHS if the large US healthcare companies force their way in?

Conservative Members say that we should just get over it, but they should recognise that 62% of the people of Scotland voted to remain. I would like us to be independent in the EU, but my Government in Scotland have come forward with what is an absolute compromise for us. I request that people read "Scotland's Place in Europe" and treat it with a bit of respect, instead of just not bothering with it and rubbishing it. We do not want to veto the right of England and Wales to come out of the EU; we just do not want to be dragged out with them.

11.45 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I was much touched by the interesting speech made by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). Significantly, he spoke about what he defined as the national interest. I implore the House to consider that we are talking about the family of nations. We are seeking to effect a compromise that respects the position of England in wanting to come out of the single market. In turn, we are asking this House to respect our position.

When we faced our referendum in 2014, it was the Conservative party, in both London and Edinburgh, that told us that if we stayed within the family of nations in the United Kingdom, our future in Europe would be guaranteed. Well, that has changed. We recognise that not only has that changed, but that our economic future now looks very different. As a response to Brexit, the currency has fallen against the dollar by more than 15%. Some commentators talk about inflation rising to

between 3% and 4%, yet this Government's programme means that those on working benefits will not get any increase in pay-outs over the course of the next four years. To put it simply, the people of our country will become poorer, and we cannot stand back and allow that to happen.

Fraser of Allander has made it clear that 80,000 jobs will go in Scotland. The average worker will be poorer to the effect of £1,200. We have been sent here to stand up for Scotland and to represent our constituents, and we have an absolute duty and obligation to say that we need to make sure that Scotland is a destination in Europe, and that we can drive prosperity and a fairer society. We say to Westminster that if it wants to come out of one Union, it might, unless it respects our position, end up coming out of two. Westminster should work with us and allow us to retain access to the single market, or it will face a situation in which we have no choice but to say to the people of Scotland that if they want that European destiny that we seek, the only way we can achieve it is through independence, and that will be down to the actions and intransigence of this Conservative Government.

11.47 pm

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): It would be very churlish of me not to recognise some of the contributions from those on the Government Benches. In particular, I wish to mention the speeches of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and the many contributions and interventions of the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). Those two individuals have probably done more to progress the cause of Scottish independence than anyone else today.

I voted, of course, with my colleagues against this ill-thought out and vastly underprepared referendum. Not only that, but, at the time, my colleagues and I said that, if there was to be a referendum, we wanted the maximum franchise possible, and this Government did the reverse. They denied the vote to the people whose future is most at stake—the 16 to 18-year-olds. Of particular concern to us at the time were the EU nationals, who were refused a vote in the referendum, but who had been allowed a vote in the Scottish referendum. I think that I was the first Member of this House to raise the issue of EU nationals.

Before the vote took place, a horrific immigration debate was unleashed, which bordered at times on xenophobia. I talked to two of my constituents, who said that they felt so upset at the whole process that they were leaving the country the week before the vote and were deciding their future. Sadly for me, they are selling their house and leaving Scotland for good. They should have been welcomed here. What happened after the people who made the immigration argument had won? Their leader horsed off to help a president get elected in the United States, pushing the same kind of vicious immigration xenophobic debate that got that man Trump elected.

On this of all days, we should remember a different Republican president. On this day in 1865, the House of Representatives of the United States passed the 13th amendment to the constitution, abolishing slavery in America. The amendment read:

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

There was a statesman—Abraham Lincoln! I will end with some of Abraham Lincoln's favourite lines, which will be recognised by many and that he carried with him all his life:

“Then let us pray that come it may,  
(As come it will for a' that),  
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,  
Shall bear the gree an' a' that .  
For a' that an' a' that,  
It's coming yet for a' that,  
That Man to Man, the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be for a' that.”

11.52 pm

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): I have learned something today: I can sit through an entire 11 hours of debate and actually enjoy it. There have been some wonderful speeches, and I have learned a lot. I was particularly taken by the speech made by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), my friend from the Treasury Committee. I thank Members on the Government Benches for staying until the end of this very long debate; I just wish that there had been more interest from other quarters in what is the most important debate that we are going to have.

I want to address two charges levelled at my party. The first is that in some way we are trying to thwart the will of the electorate. I recognise that on 23 June the people of England voted to leave the European Union. They want to leave, so the UK will leave; that is a done deal and we cannot thwart that. In fact, I will go as far as to say what the hon. Member for North East Somerset encapsulated: the English nation was reborn on 23 June. There is a new polity here.

What is important for my party is how we reconfigure the relationship between the different nations of the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for North East Somerset will know perfectly well, the British constitution has always been flexible—that is its strength. When Scotland joined the Union in 1707, we kept our own legal and educational systems. All we are asking now, in the Brexit era, is that we get a similar bespoke deal. We want to stay within the single market. We could probably not stay within the customs union—fair enough.

My real point, and the reason why we will be voting against article 50 tomorrow, is that there has not been enough discussion between the Government and the devolved Parliament on whether there can be a bespoke deal for Scotland. Government Members say that that is not possible, but let us discuss it before we trigger article 50.

The hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) made an interesting and reasonable point, saying that we have to move quickly to invoke article 50 because if we do not, there will be a period of uncertainty before we get around to finishing the negotiations, and that will harm business confidence. Our argument against that is that if we give the Prime Minister the right to trigger article 50 in March, a two-year clock will start ticking. At the end of that two years, all that will be left if we cannot get a deal will be the World Trade Organisation rules, which are no way as usable as the hon. Member for Bedford thinks. Ultimately, there is no deal on tariff allocation and no sensible dispute resolution system, so the WTO rules would be dangerous.

[George Kerevan]

The other charge is that we are arguing this as a subterfuge so that we can have a second Scottish independence referendum. Hon. Members have dealt with us in all-party parliamentary groups and in Committees. Forget the banter of this Chamber; we are serious people. We are offering a bespoke deal whereby Scotland will stay within the United Kingdom if we can stay within the single market. Put us to the test. If hon. Members think we are bluffing, call our bluff. The onus is now on you. Give us a bespoke deal and we can live within the UK in the single market.

11.56 pm

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): The people have spoken. This House must now act accordingly.

*Ordered*, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Stephen Barclay.)

*Debate to be resumed tomorrow.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West of England Combined Authority Order 2017, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved.—(Stephen Barclay.)

*Question agreed to.*

## School Funding: Greater London

*Motion made, and Question proposed*, That this House do now adjourn.—(Stephen Barclay.)

11.56 pm

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this short debate on the impact of funding changes on London's schools. I apologise to the Minister for his drawing the short straw of having to respond to a debate at midnight, although I suspect that this will be the first of many such debates.

London Members of Parliament have some grave concerns, although I know that other parts of the country are affected by changes to the funding formula and by the wider squeeze on schools funding. In my constituency—this experience will be replicated widely, particularly in London—the story of school progress over recent years has been one of the great public policy successes. In the mid-1990s, our school estate was crumbling. We were teaching children in badly ventilated, overheated and old-fashioned buildings that had not received investment for decades. I remember when North Westminster community school, which was a sprawling three-centred school, achieved in the last year before its closure just 18% GCSE grades A to C, including English and maths. It was one of the worst results in the country. I remember when half our secondary schools and a number of primary schools were in special measures, despite some frankly heroic efforts by a number of teachers and heads. I remember when there was virtually no provision at all for pre-school education.

Over the course of the past 15 years, the situation was transformed by a number of measures, including the London challenge programme—a focused management and good practice sharing policy that, under the inspirational leadership of Tim Brighouse, was widely understood to be a key factor in driving change in London schools. The transformation was also brought about by the new infrastructure, with magnificent new buildings across the city. It was brought about by the investment that went into the Sure Start children's centres and the early years programme. Critically, it was brought about by money. The additional funding that went into London schools was used particularly to invest in teaching and improved teacher pay; in support for schemes such as Teach First; and in generally giving headteachers the ability to marshal resources to support a better learning environment. We have seen the outcome of that investment—both human and resource investment—in the hugely improved outcomes in school performance across the capital.

In the days before the London Challenge, London was the worst performing region in the country at key stage 4 level. By the end of that programme and the additional investment that accompanied it, we were the best performing region. Yet we know that the job is not done. Despite the improvements, there are still too many children who are not going into secondary school having achieved the standard at primary that is our benchmark. Across the country as a whole, we are still not managing to close the gap in attainment with some of our competitor nations. That is, as the last few hours of debate have confirmed, more of a challenge to rise to than it was previously. More than ever, the country as a

whole but London in particular requires an education system that will allow us to be a world leader creatively, technically and economically, with an education system to support that.

The pressures and challenges that face London education are as great as ever. We have problems of deprivation that are still acute, and problems of churn. I appreciate very much that the Government have, for the first time, introduced a churn or pupil mobility indicator into the funding formula. I remember having an Adjournment on this very topic 10 years ago, when I wanted a factor of mobility to be brought into the funding formula for policing, for health and for education. I welcome the introduction of the indicator, but none the less schools face enormous pressure in some cases. I know of primary schools where not a single child at key stage 2 was there at the completion of the key stage 1 process. This is a very real difficulty for schools. We know of the challenges of English as an additional language and, critically, of the higher salary, building and other operating costs that London schools have to face. Even my borough of Westminster—the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who was a Westminster councillor, will recognise this—despite its reputation as the glittering centre of the capital that people see with Oxford Street and, indeed, the Palace of Westminster and so forth, has the seventh highest child poverty in the whole country.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. The impact of child poverty on educational attainment is very much the subject and the driver of the work we are doing in Hounslow with Hounslow's promise. Does she agree that there is tremendous concern about comments I have heard from headteachers suggesting that schools may be reluctant to accept pupils with significant needs, who may also be quicker to be excluded, because those schools do not have the resources to deal with some of their in-depth needs? Will she, with me, congratulate Hounslow Council, which tonight, with Tory and Labour councillors together, has called on the Government to consider again the impact that these changes will have on Hounslow schools' ability to maintain the highest standards in quality of provision?

**Ms Buck:** I am happy to congratulate Hounslow Council, and I completely endorse what my hon. Friend has said. I will come in a second to the comments of headteachers and councillors from across London who have expressed their dismay about the effect of the funding formula changes.

I want to finish what I was saying about the level of deprivation. I think that it is either not understood or glossed over by too many of the representatives from the shires, who want to negotiate a better funding settlement for their own schools—that is something that I completely understand and appreciate—but who do not always recognise the extent of the expense and the pressures faced by the capital city, which is experiencing a redistribution away of funding to meet those needs. Seven of the 10 local authorities with the highest levels of poverty in the UK are in London, so it is horrifying that the new Government formula for distributing schools funding hits London particularly hard. In briefing me for this debate, London Councils and the Mayor of London have made it clear that they are extremely concerned about that.

A higher proportion of London schools—an estimated total of 1,536—will see a reduction in funding than in any other region. Seventy per cent. of London schools face a fall in funding, compared with 58% of schools in the north-west and 53% in the west midlands—and the figures for those areas are bad enough. Eight of the 10 local authorities that face the highest percentage losses in funding are in London. Worst affected are councils known for high levels of deprivation and challenge, such as Hackney, Camden, Lambeth, Lewisham, Haringey, Tower Hamlets and Hammersmith.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate, even at this late hour. I have written to all the headteachers in my constituency over the last few weeks, and they tell me that the pressures of the increase in national insurance contributions and the cuts to their funding are already forcing them to make very difficult decisions about cuts to support staff, in particular, and to SEN provision and so on. Does she agree that those are precisely the kinds of resource that have enabled London schools to be so successful over the past 10 years?

**Ms Buck:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I will reinforce that point in a minute. The modelling undertaken by London Councils indicates that at constituency level the national funding formula element of the changes alone will mean that 28 schools lose in Barking; 35 in Bermondsey; 42 in Bethnal Green; 41 in Poplar and Limehouse; 37 in Tottenham; and 48 in West Ham, to list just a few. Leyton will lose £4.5 million—equivalent to 6.8% of its funding; Deptford £6.1 million or 7.6%; Hammersmith £5 million or 7.6%; Brent North £9 million or 7.3%; and Hendon £5.5 million.

My council, I am happy to say, is not one of the worst affected. We are still waiting for some of the modelling data, but I think that that is to do with the churn factor that the Government have introduced. Even allowing for that, many individual schools still stand to lose. Westminster Academy, for example—last time I looked, it was the seventh highest on the free school meal indicator, making it one of the most deprived schools in the country—will potentially have its funding cut by a quarter of a million pounds. According to analysis undertaken by the council, all but two secondary schools are potential losers, including Westminster Academy, Paddington Academy, St George's, St Augustine's, Pimlico Academy, St Marylebone and Westminster City. Primaries that face losses include George Eliot, St Joseph's, St Luke's, Robinsfield and Barrow Hill. Many Westminster children attend schools across the borders in Kensington, Camden and Brent, which are hit even harder. A number of local parents will be affected by the impact of the cuts on schools outside the boundary.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate, which comes at an important time. She is talking about the indices of deprivation, which are important. In the London Borough of Barnet, we do not suffer to the same extent as other people, but we have a significant number of one-form entry schools. Yesterday, I visited Etz Chaim Primary School, where the staff explained to me that economies of scale mean that they will find themselves in a very difficult financial situation. Does she agree that the Government should be looking at that as part of their

[*Dr Matthew Offord*]

funding formula? It is not just the shires that suffer from that problem; so do some local authorities in inner London.

**Ms Buck:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The pattern of school development in London—not just inner London—means that we have a historically large number of smaller schools and one-form entry schools, which are taking a particular hit from this formula.

Our troubles do not of course end with the impact of the redistribution through the funding formula. We know that the changes will coincide with the wider spending shortfall identified by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and by last month's National Audit Office report on the financial sustainability of schools. The report identified a £3 billion squeeze, reflecting the fact that education is protected in real terms, but not against inflation, the pressures arising from salary increases and national insurance contributions—my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) mentioned that—or pension contributions, the impact of the rates revaluation, the apprenticeship levy and other costs.

Taken together, the funding formula implications and the unfunded cost pressures hitting schools are turning what would already be a challenging situation into a nightmare. Schools spending next year will be reduced by £6.6 million in Westminster, £23.3 million in Newham, £13.5 million in Enfield and £11.1 million in Ealing. For some individual schools, such a scale of cuts is equivalent to £1,000 per pupil per year.

As both my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) have said in respect of their own local schools, heads and schools are also contacting me to describe their fears about the consequences of this reduction in funding. Many are anxious not to be individually identified at this stage, as in many cases they are not absolutely certain which of the many unpalatable decisions they may have to make to balance the books they will have to make, but they are keen to stress their concerns.

Heads point out that many of them are struggling to recruit at current pay grades, and trying to retain more experienced staff is of course more expensive. For others, the cuts mean the loss of teaching staff, and particularly of support staff, and some very worrying cases of special educational needs support being under threat are emerging. The early intervention services relating to mental health, speech and language, and SEN support are in some cases being targeted as areas where cuts are more possible to make than they are in the number of teaching staff. In many of those cases, schools are already grappling with the consequences of the loss of funding through child and adolescent mental health services.

One of my long-standing concerns, which I know is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood, is the issue of gangs and serious youth violence. That issue has a crossover with child protection, and it is having an impact even down to primary schools, not just secondary schools. Early intervention and support in schools is absolutely vital if we are to turn what is, unfortunately, once again a rising tide in London. At

the extreme end, two teenagers have already lost their lives in the past fortnight. I know that this is a particular concern for the Mayor, who is being briefed on the impact of school budget cuts with particular reference to early intervention.

Our outstanding nursery schools are also coping with pressures because of unrelated and already extant changes to their funding. One told me yesterday that the payment for the 30 hours provision for early years that they expected to begin in September is exactly half of what they were getting per child two years ago.

Why are we putting the quality of our children's education at risk when, facing so much uncertainty, we need skills and creativity more than ever? Why would we risk undermining London's crucial role as an economic driver for the whole country? The Government must think again, not choose this moment to inflict damage where it will hurt most—in the foundations of our future.

I want to end my speech by asking the Minister a few specific questions. I hope he will be able to answer them now, but, if not, that he will be kind enough to write to me after the debate. Although I appreciate that some parts of the country have historical spending patterns that are perceived as unjustly low, is it fair that the deepest cuts are being proposed for schools in the poorest local authorities in the country, most of which have to cope with the impact of very high staffing and other operating costs? What specific recommendations are the Government making to heads in respect of efficiency savings, which are cited as a way in which schools could accommodate both the funding formula changes and the £3 billion spending squeeze identified by the NAO? Will the Minister tell us what efficiency savings are being recommended to schools to achieve these savings?

What guidance will be given to ensure schools do not seek to meet shortfalls by seeking additional contributions from parents, as is increasingly being flagged up by schools across the capital? What action will the Minister take to ensure that special needs and pupil support are protected within school budgets, and what protection is available to schools hit by the combined impact of reductions under the funding formula and cost pressures? I know that a cap is being applied to school funding changes through the funding formula, but not to the additional cost pressures, which actually have a larger total impact. I hope that the Minister will be able to address some of those comments, and I look forward to what he has to say.

12.14 am

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. I hope I can assure her about some of the issues she raises.

Whenever a national funding formula is introduced, no matter what weightings are attached to the factors in the formula, there will be winners and losers. If we apply the formula to the current year, 2016-17, and produce an array of figures for each of the 23,000 schools, there will by definition—mathematically, it has to occur—be winners and losers. In the interests of transparency, we are showing the effect of the new formula, the factors and principles of which were agreed

in principle when we consulted last year. We have applied the new formula, with the weightings we discussed in the second consultation, to all 23,000 schools. It shows, of course, that some schools gain and some schools lose. That will happen no matter what national formula anybody in this House produces. If we want a national funding formula—we committed to that in our manifesto—that is the consequence of doing so on the basis of this year's figures.

We have committed to protecting school funding in real terms over the course of the Parliament. It stands at a record high of £40 billion at the moment, and is projected to grow to £42 billion as pupil numbers grow over the spending review period.

I share the hon. Lady's view about the success of London's schools. Their academic standards have soared in recent years, bucking the trend of inner cities throughout the world. The Government are equally ambitious for the rest of the country. All children should have an excellent education that unlocks their talent and creates opportunity regardless of where they live, their background, their ability or their need.

The Government are, because of this ambition, prioritising spending on education. We have protected the core schools budget in real terms, so that as pupil numbers rise so too does the amount of money for our schools. This means that schools are receiving more funding than ever before: a total, as I have said, of over £40 billion this year.

The current funding system prevents this record amount of money from getting to where it is needed most. Underfunded schools do not have access to the same opportunities to do the best for their pupils. It is harder for them to attract the best teachers and to afford the right support. That is why the Government are introducing a national funding formula for mainstream education and for the high-needs support provided for children with special educational needs.

The national funding formula will be the biggest change to schools and high-needs funding for well over a decade. Such change is never easy. That is why previous Governments assiduously avoided doing it. However, it will mean that for the first time we will have a transparent system that matches funding to children's needs and the schools they attend.

In the current system, schools and local areas receive significantly different levels of funding with little or no justification. For example, a primary school in Westminster teaching a pupil eligible for free school meals, and with English as an additional language, would receive £4,973 for that pupil this year. However, if that same pupil were in a school in Greenwich, the school would receive £6,676 this year, a difference of £1,703. Under our national funding formula, they would receive the same amount.

These anomalies will be ended once we have a national funding formula in place, and that is why introducing fair funding was a key manifesto commitment for the Government. Fair funding will mean that the same child with the same needs will attract the same funding regardless of where they happen to live.

We launched the first stage of our consultation on reforming schools and high-needs funding systems in March last year. We set out the principles for reform and the proposals for the overall design of the funding

system. Over 6,000 people responded, with wide support for our proposals. Building on that support, in December we were able to proceed to the second stage of the consultation, covering detailed proposals for the design of both the schools and high-needs funding formula.

Our proposals will target money towards pupils who face the greatest barriers to their education. In particular, our proposals boost the support provided for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who live in areas of deprivation but who are not eligible for free school meals, whose families are just about managing. We are putting more money into supporting pupils who have fallen behind, both in primary and secondary school, to ensure that they, too, receive the support they need to catch up.

Overall, 10,740 schools will gain funding, and the formula will allow them to see those gains quickly—54% of schools will gain. There will be increases of up to 3% in per pupil funding in 2018-19 and up to 2.5% in 2019-20. Some 72 local authority areas are due to gain high-needs funding, and they will also do so quickly, with increases of up to 3% in both 2018-19 and 2019-20. As well as providing for these increases, we have listened to those who highlighted in the first consultation the risks of major budget changes for schools, so we are also including significant protections in both the formulas. No school will face reductions of more than 1.5% a year, or 3% overall, per pupil, and no area will lose funding for high needs.

London will remain the highest-funded part of the country under these proposals. Schools in inner London will attract 30% more funding per pupil than the national average. Despite the city's increasing affluence, London's schools still have the highest proportion from disadvantaged backgrounds and the highest labour market costs in the country, so our formula matches funding to those needs, which is why those schools are funded better than those elsewhere. As a result of our proposals, 17 of the 27 schools in the hon. Member's constituency will gain funding. That is 63% of schools in her constituency.

Some schools in London, however, will see some reduction in their current funding, and this reflects significant changes in relative deprivation between the capital and the rest of the country over the last decade. For example, the proportion of London pupils eligible for free school meals dropped from 27% in 2005 to 18% in 2015, as London became more affluent, but the current funding system has taken no account of these changes. It has simply built on an anachronistic, atrophied system, over 10 years, under which we simply increase the amounts, year on year, based on a formula designed for life in 2005. It is well past time that our funding system reflected the levels of deprivation that exist today, not those that existed a decade or more ago.

For those schools that will see a budget reduction, the significant protections we are proposing will mean that no school will face reductions of more than 3% per pupil as a result of this formula. This will mean that they can manage the significant reforms while continuing to raise standards. All schools need to make the best use of the resources they have, ensuring that every pound is used effectively to improve standards and have the maximum impact for children and young people. To help them, we have put in place, and continue to develop, a comprehensive package of support to help schools

[Mr Nick Gibb]

make efficiency savings and manage cost pressures, while continuing to improve the quality of their education.

To be specific, which the hon. Member asked me to be, we are preparing a national buying scheme for things such as energy and information technology, but we are also providing advice to schools about how to manage staff and ensure the right combination of staff to reflect the curriculum they are providing.

We are using a broad definition of disadvantage to target additional funding to schools most likely to use it, comprising pupil and area-level deprivation data, prior attainment data and English as an additional language. No individual measure is enough on its own. Each picks up different aspects of the challenges that schools face, and they work together to target funding. Where a child qualifies for more than one of these factors, the school receives funding for each qualifying factor. For example, if a child comes from a more disadvantaged household and lives in an area of socio-economic deprivation, their school will attract funding through both the free school meals factor and the area-level deprivation factor. That helps us to target funding most accurately to the schools that face the most acute challenges, while not ignoring the needs of children who face some barrier to achievement, and of course the school will continue to receive additional funding through the pupil premium to help them improve the attainment of the most disadvantaged.

There are specific reasons why funding as a whole rises by 0.7% in the hon. Lady's constituency, and they include the growing affluence, as I have said. Historically,

Westminster has been one of the lower-funded inner-London local authorities. As a result, it sets higher basic per pupil funding than most other local authorities in England, and the difference between Westminster's basic per pupil funding rates and the national funding formula rates is not as substantial as in other parts of London. The majority of schools in Westminster North are primary schools rather than secondary schools. The Westminster formula is currently marginally more generous to secondary schools than under the national funding formula, so primary schools benefit from a slight adjustment to the primary-to-secondary ratio that we are introducing. Schools in Westminster North gain from the national funding formula deprivation and low prior attainment factors.

Westminster Council currently chooses not to use IDACI, the income deprivation affecting children index, factor for primary schools at all—it does for secondary—so its schools are gaining from the broader measure of deprivation that we are using in the national funding formula. The national funding formula's prior low attainment factor is also more generous than Westminster's formula, at £1,050 plus the area cost adjustment under the national funding formula, compared with £722 under the Westminster formula.

On that note, I hope that I have assured the hon. Lady that this is a fairer funding system, but I shall be happy to discuss the details with her in due course.

*Question put and agreed to.*

12.26 am

*House adjourned.*

## Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 31 January 2017*

[JOAN RYAN *in the Chair*]

### **Immigration Rules: Spouses and Partners**

9.30 am

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered immigration rules for spouses and partners.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Ryan, as we debate what I believe is a vital issue to revisit and reconsider. It affects the family lives of many thousands of our constituents in a most intrusive way, and it calls on us to consider where our priorities really lie: in pursuing utterly misguided targets at all costs, or in protecting people's human rights and the best interests of children? I understand that this is the first time Parliament has considered the matter since a few months after the draconian new rules were introduced in July 2012, so the debate is overdue.

I want to thank those colleagues who helped me secure the debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), who accompanied me to the Backbench Business Committee. I also thank the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), the hon. Members for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), for Bradford West (Naz Shah), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), for South Down (Ms Ritchie) and for Bedford (Richard Fuller), and my hon. Friends the Members for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for their support. That is MPs from six different parties and representing everywhere from Shetland to Brighton and from Bedford to South Down, and it is great to see other MPs here today. This issue affects and concerns all corners of the UK and those from all walks of life. Few MPs will not have had at least one tragic constituency case; most will have had several.

Right now, the judges of the Supreme Court are busy again deciding whether the rules are in fact illegal and in breach of human rights. They might force the Government to think again. Regardless of what they do, Parliament should be making the Government think again and rewriting the rules. Many different aspects of the rules deserve criticism and require reform, from costs and complexity to ridiculously restrictive evidential requirements.

I want to focus on two of the rules that work together in an extraordinarily unfair, and I would say inhumane, manner. The first is the financial threshold, which is among the most draconian and restrictive in the world, whether measured in relative or absolute terms. The second is the rule excluding evidence about other forms of income, such as third-party support from family or friends or—even more ludicrously—the potential earnings of the non-EU spouse or partner. That gets to the crux of the matter. Those rules are cruelly and unnecessarily restrictive and draconian, and the consequences for families have been utterly brutal.

The rules mean that we no longer have a fairly light-touch financial maintenance test broadly equating to income support levels of £5,500. Non-EU applicants wishing to join their spouse or partner here are now required to show that their UK-settled sponsor earns at least £18,600, and thousands of pounds extra if there is a child or children involved.

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): The threshold is utterly unfair, particularly in places such as Rochdale where wages are much lower than in other parts of the United Kingdom, and London in particular.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I will come to the disproportionate impact of the threshold in just a moment.

When those two rules are combined, astonishingly almost half the UK population would be excluded from ever being able to sponsor the person they love to come and join them, if that person happened to be from outside the EU. As the hon. Gentleman just said, there are disproportionate impacts on some segments of the population, for fairly obvious reasons related to average incomes, so even higher proportions of young people, women and some ethnic minorities, and essentially all those who live outside London and the south-east, are affected.

Tens of thousands of adults have been forced by the Government to choose between the country that is their home and that they love and the people who they want to share their home with and who they love even more. That is a horrible and cruel choice. What is the Government's justification for that? The official Government position is that it serves to protect the public purse and encourage integration. The first of those is of dubious accuracy and questionable relevance. The second I fail completely to understand at all, so I will listen with interest to what the Minister has to say if he wants to maintain that argument. I simply note that it was comprehensively rebutted in a report for the Children's Commissioner that I will consider shortly.

On the public purse issue, the Government claimed that the requirement would save £660 million over 10 years—it would be good to know if they are doing up-to-date research on that—but Middlesex University has persuasively argued that the coalition Government, who introduced the rules, did not take into account the loss of the wider economic benefits of migrant partners' economic activity. In fact, its model suggested a cost to the taxpayer over that period of £850 million.

Needless to say, the Government did not accept that analysis and pressed ahead, fixing a threshold at the level that the Migration Advisory Committee said would be the annual gross pay required for a couple at which they would not receive income-related benefits, assuming weekly rent of £100. I am not criticising the MAC, which functions like a finely tuned, high-spec computer performing some amazing analysis. However, as with such a computer, the principle of "garbage in, garbage out" applies: if a half-baked question is asked, a half-baked answer is given.

As the MAC pointed out, its deliberations were based purely on economic considerations and did not take into account wider legal, social or moral issues related to family migration. That was absolutely correct. Of course, in implementing its recommendation, the Government

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

did not think to factor in that even if £18,600 was the right threshold, both halves of the marriage or partnership should be allowed to contribute to meeting it, not just the UK sponsor. A talented non-EU national could have a job offer—they might even have worked in the UK in the past under a different visa—yet they cannot join their spouse or partner here if their UK spouse or partner is, agonisingly, just a few hundred pounds short of the income threshold. That makes absolutely no sense.

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I, too, pay tribute to the MAC for its work. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the MAC recommended a range between £18,600 and £25,700 and that, given that range, the Government chose the lowest figure they could?

**Stuart C. McDonald:** It is true the Government chose the lesser of two evils, but I go back to the point I made before: it all depended on the question that the Government asked of MAC, which dictated the answer that came back. They could have looked at a million different alternatives. For example, in some litigation before the courts, reference has been made to the minimum wage, which is considerably less than £18,600. In my view, there was nothing wrong with the threshold previously in place, which was broadly £5,500—a rate that equated to income support at that time. There is even a case for removing the financial threshold altogether. So, yes, the Government chose the lesser of two evils, but that was from the question they asked in the first place.

The all-party parliamentary group on migration rightly pointed out that there will be many cases where the separation of parents leads to increased reliance on social security benefits. All of that is largely hypothetical anyway, since as we all know the non-EU spouse is prohibited from accessing social security benefits in any event for five years.

Ultimately, we should not engage in a balance-sheet debate that excludes from consideration family life and the best interests of children. We are talking about people—husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters—whose lives are being absolutely ruined. I have no doubt that colleagues will raise many constituency cases today, and each of them is absolutely deserving of our attention.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to look at issues such as caring responsibilities? A number of constituents have come to my surgeries whose spouse would be able to care for and look after them, but they have been prevented from getting into the country, which has had a hugely detrimental impact on the constituents' physical and mental health.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I agree, and that is a perfect illustration of what the all-party parliamentary group was saying about how the rules can lead to an increased reliance on social security benefits. It also puts a big question mark over any Government argument that the rules somehow benefit integration. They certainly do not benefit the integration into society of the UK sponsor left here picking up the pieces.

All of that suffering is well documented in various reports and pieces of research, and I thank everyone who has been involved in documenting the effects of this mean-spirited and cruel Government policy. Utterly compelling is the report prepared in September 2015 for the Children's Commissioner for England about the effect on at least 15,000 children—by now the figure is probably pushing on 20,000—living in “Skype families” across the UK. It detailed how the Government's policy was causing those children separation anxiety, increased levels of anger and disobedience, greater levels of aggression, signs of depression, disrupted sleep, eating problems, social isolation and withdrawal, and feelings of guilt. Ultimately, what matters is that those children are being kept apart from one parent by the Government's nasty immigration policies. In short, the Children's Commissioner was clear that the Government's legal obligations to children are not properly recognised in the rules and that too many decisions completely fail to take into account the best interests principle.

Last week, Phoebe Griffith of the Institute for Public Policy Research told members of the Home Affairs Committee that the net migration target had

“created a whole set of quite perverse incentives”.

She used policies on international students as an example, but I think that an even clearer example is the drastic changes to the immigration rules for non-EU spouses and partners that were introduced in July 2012. The real reason for the rules is the Prime Minister's near-pathological obsession with her bogus net migration target, and it seems that it does not matter to her who is hurt as a result. Too many UK citizens with non-EU spouses and UK children with non-EU parents know that better than any of us. How many more families do the Government want to plunge into the nightmare in pursuit of the target? Will they apply the same rules to EU spouses after Brexit, for example?

For the reasons I have explained, and many more that I am sure hon. Members will touch on, the Government should go back to the drawing board and put families and children first.

9.40 am

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have this debate today. It has been more than three years since spousal visa rules have been debated in Parliament, so I am sure that Members will agree that the debate is long overdue. Although my constituency has a declining population and a low number of migrants, my inbox is still regularly punctuated by spousal visa cases. The people who come to me for assistance generally assume that it is a straightforward process for a UK citizen to bring a spouse from outside the European economic area into their own country. It is a reasonable assumption to make, but the sad reality is that UK spousal visa rules are not straightforward or logical; they are arbitrary, unfair and discriminatory, and they constitute disproportionate interference in genuine spousal relationships.

The policy has led to the rise of so-called Skype families, where children can maintain contact with one of their parents only by using the online messaging system Skype, as my hon. Friend the Member for

Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) explained. The policy has had many negative consequences and it should make us reflect on the social contract that should exist between the UK Government and citizens. If citizens pay their taxes and act within the law, the Government have an obligation to protect their rights, including the right to a family life.

However, it is clear that the Government are failing in that obligation by standing in the way of UK citizens who have married partners from outside the EEA. The rationale for that policy is that the Government want to prevent migrants from becoming a burden on the state—the value of the person being determined only by how much money they have. My understanding was that the Tory party believed in small, limited government that gives citizens the maximum freedom to pursue their lives. Yet the Government are obstructing citizens' most fundamental relationships: those between spouses and between parents and children.

Ryan Shorthouse, the founder and director of the Conservative think-tank Bright Blue, went so far as to say that the rules are not conservative and that they damage society by splitting up the key ingredient of a compassionate society, the family. The system does not work and does not deliver positive results for the UK or its citizens. I do not expect the Minister suddenly to deviate from the Government's irrational commitment to reducing net migration, but at the very least I would like to see changes to the spousal visa application process.

First, the minimum salary requirement has to be reduced so that it more accurately reflects the wages of all UK citizens, not just the richest. Research conducted by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford shows that the financial requirement disproportionately affects women, ethnic minorities and those outside London. It is estimated that 41% of people in Scotland would be ineligible to sponsor a non-EEA family member, compared with 27% in London. Paradoxically, that means that the UK Government have created an immigration system where getting access to the areas with the highest population pressures is easier than getting access to Scotland, which has lower average wages than London but is in desperate need of more people.

The Home Office might feel generous in stating that any deficiency in income can be topped up with savings. If a sponsor has a shortfall in income of £2,000, the Home Office formula would require them to have £21,000 in savings to meet the financial requirement. That is an absurd amount, considering that more than 16 million people in the UK and almost half the people of Scotland have less than £100 in savings. The Government can hide behind the income threshold analysis outlined by the Migration Advisory Committee, but that would simply be an exercise in dehumanising my constituents and trying to put a monetary value on the family relationships of UK citizens.

Secondly, the Government must reduce the application fees, which are large and increasing. From March 2016 they rose by an unjustifiable 25%. To apply for a spousal visa in person now costs £1,311, while phoning the international helpline costs £1.37 a minute. When the £500-per-person NHS levy is taken into consideration, families can easily spend between £5,000 and £10,000

on fees over a five-year period, and possibly more, depending on how many children they have. Far from being a burden on the state, spouses of UK citizens are paying exceptional amounts of money just to have their applications considered.

Thirdly, it is time to simplify the application process. By that I do not mean simply making it an online process. A typical document that applicants are expected to complete is the FLR(M) application form, which is 81 pages. It covers every aspect of a person's life—where they have lived, their relationships, their housing situation and their personal finances. Aside from the unnecessary and intrusive questioning, applicants are asked if they have been involved in genocide, war crimes or terrorist activities. It would be helpful for the Minister to outline how many war criminals have been apprehended thanks to question 10.8 in the spousal visa application.

In conjunction with a more streamlined application process, I would like the Minister to consider relaxing the rules on evidence requirements. For instance, applicants are required to provide original hard copies of documents in support of their application. We live in an age when payslips, bank statements and bills are increasingly moving online. Little guidance is available through official channels and applicants are forced towards often unreliable and out-of-date sources on the internet to learn what documents they need to provide.

The infamous inflexibility of visa assessors makes the process even more difficult, as applicants know that one small and even insignificant mistake can lead to a refusal with life-changing ramifications. The Minister will be pleased to know that I have brought a copy of the 81-page application form with me today. I invite him to take it with him, complete it and prepare the evidence that he would need to submit a successful application for himself and a partner and children. As a highly paid Minister, he cannot understand the years of uncertainty and financial pressure that the process creates for UK citizens and their families. Completing the application will, however, give him a limited understanding of how his laborious system works in practice.

Time constrains me from touching on the many other issues associated with spousal visa rules. I regret that I cannot highlight even some of the absurd situations that my constituents have experienced because of the inflexibility that is at the heart of the policy. A drastic change of attitude is required at the Home Office. It should stop treating UK citizens and their families as if they have done something wrong and need to justify their existence, and as if they are unwelcome in the UK. UK citizens deserve the Department's support, no matter whom they marry. Freedom to marry and live with a loved one should not be reserved for those who have the money. If the Minister is content to divide families then let him keep the rules. If not, let him reform them as a matter of urgency. Families in the UK have suffered enough.

I want finally to thank my researcher, Colin MacDonald. He was born in the USA to a Scottish mother, was raised in Australia and now lives in Scotland with his wonderful Chinese Singaporean wife. If Colin says that the system is overly complicated, expensive and discriminatory, the Government should listen, because he knows it inside out. His tireless commitment to helping others has gone a long way to reuniting wives with their husbands and children with their parents.

9.48 am

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Ryan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing this morning's important debate. Immigration visa matters are among the most common constituency casework for MPs. Putting the complexity of the UK immigration system to one side, I struggle to put into words my frustration with a system that lacks any common sense. It is incredibly complacent and riddled with mistakes and inconsistencies, and its approach to dealing with clients wanting to extend a stay in this country or come to join partners and families is amateur.

I put no blame on the hard-working staff at immigration centres. They work in stressful circumstances in a system that makes an already difficult job harder. Despite the stress of their work, my experience of contacting the Home Office has mostly been positive. Staff have always done their best to find answers to questions that I have raised with them.

The Scottish National party has long opposed the UK Government's approach to immigration. My feelings have only been strengthened during my time in this place—particularly during my time serving on the Public Bill Committee for the Immigration Act 2016. SNP Members view the immigration system as inflexible, treating applicants with suspicion and not catering to the needs of all parts of the UK. We have witnessed cases in the highlands of Scotland in which hard-working families have been threatened with deportation because they do not meet all the requirements of the UK Government's rigid and unfair system. That is despite the massive contribution they make to their local communities, where the problem is not immigration but emigration.

I may not represent a highland community, but I have experienced a system that is counterproductive to the economic needs of my constituency. I am currently assisting one of my constituents, who is from Houston; given that we are dealing with an American spouse, I should stress we are talking about Houston, Renfrewshire, not the Texas hamlet that pales into insignificance when compared with the original and best. My constituent, Beth, is having a fairly torrid time in trying to get a spousal visa for her American husband. Beth and her husband, Willie, met at Glasgow University and spent a few years in California working as highly skilled and specialised vets.

As a result of Beth's mother falling seriously ill, they made plans to return to Scotland. They both gained employment as vets, thereby meeting and exceeding the necessary wage threshold in a skilled job, and were expecting a straightforward, successful application. However, the Home Office refused Willie's application on the grounds that it had doubts over the legitimacy of the relationship—despite the US Government having already awarded Beth a spousal visa and indefinite right to remain in California. Despite their meeting at Glasgow University in 2007, being together since 2012 and marrying in 2014, regularly coming back to Scotland on holiday, securing employment and meeting the wage threshold, and despite the emotional circumstances surrounding Beth's mum, the Home Office still refused the application.

The case would be laughable if the process had not caused an overwhelming amount of stress and pain for Beth, Willie and their families. After they applied relentless pressure and jumped through the burdensome hoops, and after I made the Immigration Minister aware of the case—I am grateful for his assistance—the Home Office has now accepted that a real relationship exists between Beth and Willie. However, anyone who thinks that is the end of the story is probably inexperienced in dealing with the immigration system.

The Home Office—after first emailing an incorrect address—has requested that Willie makes the final international health surcharge payment on his application and sends over his American passport. However, Willie has already made that payment a long time ago, and UK Visas and Immigration already has his passport. My office has been trying for weeks to get the situation resolved but, frustratingly, UKVI is all over the place with the case and does not realise that Willie has completed everything that has been asked of him and more.

Hopefully that case will be resolved soon enough. It should have been a clearcut case for UKVI, but needless problems and delays have caused much stress and misery for the family, cost a significant amount of taxpayers' money and caused real logistical problems for the employer, who deserves great credit for holding the job open in good faith despite the Home Office's delays.

The previous Immigration Minister, the now Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said last year:

“The Government certainly do recognise the contribution that skilled and talented people from outside this country can make to our economy, and I have been very explicit about the way in which our immigration rules are designed to facilitate that.”—[*Official Report*, 26 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 689WH.]

We have heard that refrain time and again, despite the barriers erected and fortified by the same Government. My question to the current Minister is whether he will apologise for the stress caused to Beth, Willie and the entire family. They have done everything asked of them and met every criterion that the Government set, at great expense. All they want is to help to take care of Beth's mother, live together in the UK and contribute to wider society.

That case highlights the deep flaws rooted in the immigration system. Despite Beth earning more than the £18,600 minimum annual income that was put in place in 2012, Willie experienced a number of issues when trying to secure the appropriate visa to join her. When the coalition Government introduced the minimum income threshold, it was widely criticised and challenged in the courts. Civil society at large, including the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the Migrants' Rights Network, BritCits and the Family Immigration Alliance campaigned against the minimum income requirement, claiming that it would divide families and make it harder for the overseas spouses of UK citizens to join them. In my experience of helping people go through the visa process, the initial fears raised back in 2012 have proven entirely correct.

I will touch on some common criticisms of the minimum income requirement. First, notwithstanding the Minister's earlier intervention, the threshold was set too high, with hard-working and genuine applicants losing out as a result. I do not doubt that we all value the positive contribution that our international friends make to life

in the UK. They enrich our communities, and we offer some the opportunity to better themselves. However, the threshold prevents many people from being able to live a life in the UK, especially when we consider that as many as 45% of people in the UK earn less than the required threshold, particularly in areas outside London and the south-east.

Secondly, research conducted by the University of Oxford confirms that the policy disproportionately affects particular groups. It found that the minimum income requirement has

“important indirect effects across gender, ethnicity, education, age and place of residence.”

Female workers hoping to act as sponsors for their male partners are particularly disadvantaged, with 57% not earning enough to sponsor a non-EEA spouse.

The financial threshold has been called unfair, disproportionate and counterproductive, and it is for that reason that the UK is now considered to have the least family-friendly immigration policies in the developed world. For a party that preaches the importance of family, it seems strange that the Conservative party would design a system that breaks families apart; as a result of the Government’s policies, families have been separated and children are growing up without a parent.

It seems entirely nonsensical and almost beyond comprehension that no account is taken of foreign spouses’ prospective earnings. Because of the financial threshold, many skilled workers may be discouraged from returning to, or choosing to settle in, Scotland, and will instead go elsewhere. Instead of the savings originally predicted, the minimum income requirement could end up costing the UK more, with the loss of tax revenue from migrants who have been unable to come to the UK, and with some families unnecessarily having to rely on benefits because the migrant partner is unable to join them.

The Government must review this unfair policy, which is hurting families all over the UK. We need a reasonable immigration system that does not separate children from their parents or wives and husbands from each other, and does not prevent migrants from making a positive contribution to the UK. We need a fair, robust and secure immigration system that takes account of the varied social and economic needs of different areas of the country and does not discriminate against half the population. Perhaps even more importantly, we need to allow UKVI officers and the Home Office in general to exercise common sense, which in many cases would save taxpayers money and end the continuing stress of so many people like Beth and Willie.

9.57 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): First, I apologise for not being here in time; I have already done that through the Speaker’s Office. The Heathrow Express was late, and as a result I had to run; Mo Farah and Usain Bolt have nothing to fear, no matter how hard I run. That is how I got here. I apologise to the proposer of the debate, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and I congratulate him on his presentation. Unfortunately I missed it, but I am sure the gist of what he said will be exactly the same as what I will say and what other hon. Members have said.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister in his place. I know he works hard on these issues; we bring issues to him and he responds to us faithfully, and we very much appreciate that relationship as elected representatives. I thank him for that. I also thank the UK Border Agency staff, who I speak to regularly and who always give me advice and assistance within the rules that have been laid down. I have to say that I am not happy with some of those rules.

It will be no shock that I take a more humanistic understanding of the issues regarding immigration rules for spouses and partners in the UK. The rules introduced on 9 July 2012 by the Home Office mean that, to bring a foreign spouse into Britain, somebody would have to maintain employment that provides a minimum income of £18,600. That has left some 33,000 people unable to remain with their spouse, as many do not earn the required amount to satisfy that visa requirement. In Northern Ireland, and I suspect in Scotland, many people are not in that income bracket, which is an issue of concern.

We know how the system works and we understand it very well. For families with one child, the income requirement rises to £22,400, rising a further £2,400 for each extra child. By its very nature, the income needed almost debar many people from qualifying. For me, that is an extortionate amount for genuine couples who are marrying for love, not for benefits from the UK Government or the system we have. It seems that the rules introduced have affected the more vulnerable and the less wealthy.

Recent studies show that around 47% of British people do not earn enough to fall in love with a foreign national; it is as simple as that. What is worse, under the rules a migrant applicant’s overseas income does not count towards the threshold. Will the Minister consider looking at that as one way to address the issue? That would go a long way to getting an arrangement that works. How can it be fair that a migrant’s income is not taken into account at all? With great respect to people who live in London, the rules appear to suit only those who live in London, graduates and those in well-paid jobs. Some 73%—nearly three quarters—of people living in the capital meet the threshold in the immigration rules for spouses and partners and are more likely than the rest of the country to sponsor a spouse from outside Europe. Surely many people outside London would love the opportunity to live with their spouse.

The law also discriminates against women, with research showing that some 55% of British women and 53% of those under 30 are excluded from bringing a spouse into Britain. If we are unfairly discriminating against women, that is an issue we have to consider. I understand that there are rules in place for a reason—for our protection—and I do not for one second believe that there should be an onus on the Government to take care of people who are not British. However, it is clear that the level of income needed is not what it takes to run a household in the United Kingdom. The Government set a minimum income for a standard of living that is much less than that, and we must consider that.

We should welcome those who wish to make a life in the United Kingdom with their families, work hard and contribute to our society. One argument heard when the legislation was introduced was that the Government would save some £650 million. That is not a sum to be

[*Jim Shannon*]

sneered at; we have to be realistic. The Government stated that the minimum income rule was to prevent unqualified spouses from coming to the UK and becoming dependent on the state. However, further research done by Middlesex University found that if most spouses turned away at the borders had found employment, they would have made a contribution of more than £850 million to the UK economy. To me, the figures are simple. Let them in.

As a married man, I believe in marriage between one man as husband and one woman as wife. I consider it the most intimate of human relationships and a gift from God. In the Bible, Hebrews 13:4 tells us:

“Let marriage be held in honour among all”.

Why is a marriage between a UK citizen and a foreign national not held in the same honour or deemed less? No Government, no party and no institution should deny any man the right to be married to his wife or any woman the right to be married to her husband. Marriage should not be established in the UK by the taxman or Government penalties.

I have been involved in a number of immigration battles. As I was just saying to my colleague, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), I deal with these issues every week in my office, and they are terribly important. I feel frustration on behalf of my constituents who happen to be married to someone from another country. This issue comes up all the time. One immigration battle involved a two-and-a-half year fight by a husband and wife, costing in excess of £7,000 for the solicitor's fees and other fees—that is £7,000 for a person who does not have £18,500. Right away, that imposes a strain on newly wedded couples. Is that how we would like to start our married lives, given the strains and adjustments that are already on a new marriage?

We also need to think of the possible effects on the children of these marriages. The rules have been criticised by the Children's Commissioner. More than 15,000 children are separated from one of their parents because of our broken system. I find that fact utterly heartbreaking. A Filipino lady who had married a fellow from Newtownards came to see me. They had a child. We played by the immigration rules, but because of those rules, she had to leave her baby at home with the dad, go back to the Philippines and then start again through the system. It took her almost nine months. During those nine months, she could see her child through Skype but could not hold them in her hands, cuddle them or love them. That is an example of what I have been involved in.

Imagine parents being separated from their children, who are living in another country, all because they do not earn the recommended minimum income for our country. Is that how we would want our child to be raised? Is that how we would have wanted to be raised, as children? Those are the questions we need to ask ourselves. Can we not do more to make provisions for couples who have children? Again, I ask the Minister what we can do to assist. I have seen the devastation at first hand in my own constituency.

I want to give another example. A number of people from the Philippines and lots of people from across the eastern bloc work in my constituency. A young Filipino

came to Northern Ireland with a visa more than six months ago but unfortunately could not get one for her 12-year-old son. He was sent home because she did not have the required minimum income to sustain him; that was the consequence of the Government's scheme. We can imagine how hard that was. The case was won on appeal—there is an appeal system, and it works—but that child has still not been given his visa months later. His mother rings my office every week asking when her son will be able to start a life with her. I see the heartbreak in that young woman's eyes and hear the pain in her voice every week. Cases such as that make me say we must do better, and I implore the Minister to do that. I know he is a compassionate man who is always responsive when we ask him to do things; we can never, nor will ever, fault him for that.

The agri-food industry has brought workers over to my constituency, where we have a number of agri-food businesses. In one company, 40% of the workforce is from eastern Europe and in another the figure is 60%, so we can understand the importance of that workforce to those companies. Some of the workers have met and married local girls and guys. With Brexit on the horizon, their visa situation must be made clear. They ask me about it all the time. I spoke to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she visited Northern Ireland, and she was very keen to ensure that the people working in the factories will have security and tenure.

The Minister and I have talked about this before, but we have an opportunity for an overhaul that protects us but allows for marriages that are not determined by someone's ability to earn a high wage. Let us protect the people who are here and ensure they can continue to offer something and work hard. The local caretaker has as much right to love as a doctor. The song “Love Don't Cost a Thing” certainly does not apply in the UK Visas and Immigration department, and we need to revamp and look again truthfully and sincerely at our criteria. I believe we can ensure that people cannot claim off the state without splitting up marriages and families. It can be done, so let us do it.

10.7 am

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I want to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)—or Kirky East, as we like to call it—on securing this extremely important debate and on his knowledgeable speech. He has a background in this area. Everybody who has spoken today has demonstrated how much they care about the people they represent. It is important to do that, even when we feel like we are banging our heads against a brick wall, and even when we feel that the Government are possibly not listening and that nothing will change. People need to know that there are Members in this place who care about them and will keep speaking up for them; that makes a difference to them. I congratulate everyone who has spoken today on demonstrating how much we care.

When the topic of spousal visas comes up, as it does from time to time, people generally react with shock to the news that UK citizens are not automatically entitled to bring their partner to live with them in the UK, as my

hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan)—land of my birth—said. When I detail the hurdles and hoops that most couples have to jump through, the response is always one of disbelief. People think I have got it wrong. They say, “Surely it is an infringement of civil liberties to be denied the right to live with your spouse,” or, “Is there a price on love?” Well, according to the Home Office, there is a price for marrying someone from another country, and it is a high one.

Applying for a spousal visa is an expensive process that should, in itself, indicate the commitment to the relationship. In addition to the application fee, which is now more than £1,300—as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde said, that is an increase of 25%—lawyers’ costs can be not inconsiderable, as applications often drag on for years through the appeal or reapplication process, putting not only a financial strain but debilitating emotional stress on couples and families.

If people can find the money to make an application, the three main barriers preventing many of them from living with their non-British or non-EU partners are the minimum income threshold, as we have heard; the complicated application process; and, perhaps most importantly from what I have experienced through my constituents, the culture of disbelief at the heart of the Home Office. We have heard examples, notably from my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who talked about Beth and Willie in Houston—the Houston. He told us that even when an MP gets involved, that often makes very little difference. The MP must then battle for months on end to get mistakes rectified. One mistake in that case was the Home Office calling for a passport that had already been sent in. Then we heard the horrifying story from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) of a baby being separated from its mother for nine months. It is not necessary to be a psychologist to know the damage that that could do to the baby’s development.

I want to share a few examples of my own. It was difficult to decide which of my constituents in this position to talk about, because there are so many and all are struggling, but I will start with Jane. She was a young Scottish woman who emigrated to New York in the 1960s; she was just 18 years old. She met and fell head over heels for Ben, a native New Yorker. They married, raised two children, saw their grandchildren born and, like all couples, faced the many trials and tribulations that life threw at them in their 50-plus years together. When the trials seemed more prominent, they sadly divorced. However, that did not feel right and they were soon back together.

As Jane and Ben reached what should have been their golden years, they decided, having spent their married life in the United States, to spend their retirement in Jane’s home country of Scotland. They owned a house in Glasgow and set plans in motion to come home, but those plans were scuppered by the Home Office, which did not believe that they were a couple. That couple had been together for more than 50 years, throughout the 1960s, ’70s, ’80s and ’90s and into the new millennium, but they were subjected to the insult and embarrassment of having the validity of their relationship questioned.

I am pleased to say that the situation is now resolved and Jane and Ben are finally living, I hope, happily ever after in Milton in my constituency, but that took more than 18 months from the day their original application

was rejected. The costs were high, involving considerably more not just in application fees and legal costs, but in terms of the deterioration in Jane’s failing health, which was exacerbated by the regular separations from her husband and the complete uncertainty about their future together.

If the Home Office can cast doubt on a 50-year relationship, what chance do a young couple have? Will the Minister be good enough to tell me why Jane was advised that if she wanted to be with her husband, she should go and live in the United States? How can we expect other countries to take in a British citizen if we refuse to take in theirs because we do not believe they have a relationship? I just wonder what the British Government’s friend, Mr Trump, would make of the advice that Jane was given.

Another constituent, Sasha, met the man who was to become her husband, Jay, on a family holiday in Pakistan when she was just four years old. They became the best of friends as they continued to meet over the years during regular family holidays. As they grew into adulthood, friendship blossomed into love. Sasha and Jay got married in 2011 and are now the proud parents of two beautiful children. People might expect that to be the “happily ever after” ending to the story, but no: the Home Office was ready to rain on their parade, and rain it did. It took decision makers at the Home Office a shocking five years to accept that that was a real relationship. In fact, Sasha’s husband was able to join his wife and children in Glasgow only last week. The Home Office did not believe that they were in a relationship. It was a sham, the Home Office alleged. That Sasha had not visited her husband very often since the wedding was one excuse used. Well, that was correct: Sasha did not visit her husband as much as she would have liked, because she had to work every hour she could to maintain the minimum income requirement and to take care of their two children. That is what the Home Office told her she had to do. As my hon. Friends the Members for Inverclyde and for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said, if someone is female and lives north of London, they are far less likely to be able to reach the minimum income requirement.

The result was that the two children, born in 2012 and 2014, got to know their father, during their most formative years, as a face on a laptop. In whose view is that fair? Six years on from their wedding day, that young couple and their children are no longer a Skype family and are finally able to live together as a family, but why should that have taken so long? Why is there so much distrust? Who benefits from it? Is it the Home Office? Is it immigration lawyers? It is certainly not the British citizen, and definitely not their children. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East told us, the Children’s Commissioner said that the Government were not meeting their legal requirement to children. I argue that they are not meeting their moral requirement to them, either.

As we have heard from other hon. Members, no one is disputing that there has to be a system. There must be procedures and checks, and documents and statements must be verified. We know that that has to be done, but it can be done without hostility, and so it should be. It can be done without insensitivity, and so it should be. It can be done without the Home Office contradicting another Department under the same Government—I

[Anne McLaughlin]

am talking about the Department for Work and Pensions. The Minister's colleagues in that Department tell us that a couple require £5,972.20 per annum to live on; that is the current rate of jobseeker's allowance for a couple. Let us add in an amount for housing benefit, using average rents in Glasgow, which are about £250 a month in social housing and £500 a month for a private let. That adds on between £3,000 and £5,000 a year, so the DWP thinks that a couple can get by pretty well on anything between £9,000 and £12,000 per annum, and the Home Office reckons that a couple need £18,600. Well, which is it? If the DWP is correct, the Home Office needs to reduce that threshold. If the Home Office is right, surely those on jobseeker's allowance are in for a bumper pay rise. Considering that those under the age of 24 apparently require so much less on which to live, the injustice is even greater for those under the age of 24 who want their spouse to come and live here.

Who else needs very little to live on, according to this Government? The answer is carers. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) talked about people being unable to bring their partner over to care for them. I want to talk about a constituent who has been deemed to be too poor to support herself and her husband, because she is a carer.

Christine was not always a carer. She worked freelance, so it was not easy to demonstrate that she earned enough every year to meet the minimum income requirement to be allowed to bring her husband to live in Scotland. She was getting there, however. She was building up her portfolio and excitedly looking forward to being permanently reunited with her husband. Then both her parents became ill, one of them very seriously with leukaemia. She did what she believed to be the right thing and moved in with them to care for them, but that decision to return the love and care that her parents had shown her as a child, and save the taxpayer thousands of pounds at the same time, means that she has had to reduce the amount of paid work that she does. In fact, yesterday she told my office that her mum had become very ill and in recent weeks she has earned nothing and relies on her husband to send money from Nigeria.

As the hon. Member for Strangford asked, can the income of the man currently supporting a British family not be counted towards the minimum income threshold? I ask that because the decision that Christine took to care for her parents in effect means that she may never be able to bring her husband here. I know that she is watching, so I am saying "may never", because I hope that she will—and she could do with him right now. She could do with a helping hand with her parents and with someone looking after her from time to time. She could do with a hug from the man whom she loves and who loves her, but she is being denied that because she chose to care for her parents. Perhaps the Minister will offer to look into that case for me and consider making an exception in Christine's case.

Do I have another few minutes, Ms Ryan?

**Joan Ryan (in the Chair)** *indicated assent.*

**Anne McLaughlin:** Great. I have an endless supply of these stories, as have other hon. Members, but I will not refer to them all. The people we talk of are not exceptions.

The Government, as on many things, hide behind the idea that "Yes, that's terrible, but it's an exception to the rule; that sort of thing does not happen very often." These people are not exceptions, because we hear about this all the time, and what is happening to them is definitely not acceptable.

When this debate came up, my office and media manager, Annette, went off and wrote much of this speech. I did not ask her to do that; she did it without asking. Why? Because she has recently divorced her husband after years of trying to get him here for even a visit—he did not want to come and live here, but wanted to visit and eventually she was going to go and live there. She could not even get him here for a visit, and it would have been years before she was able to go and live there. Failing that, they had no way of continuing their marriage. She knew that this country would never welcome her husband at any stage if it would not even allow him to come in for a visit. I remember well that he was rejected at one point because he had a job and then rejected at another time because he did not have a job.

Annette has a simple ask, which I share, and I am sure we all have the same ask. It is that we treat people as we expect to be treated ourselves. Most of us believe that being treated with respect, fairness and compassion is not too much to expect; it is not, but the fact that we seem unable to bring any of those basics to the process leaves me feeling embarrassed and, to be frank, utterly ashamed.

10.20 am

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Let me say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. We all commend you for the dedication you have shown, despite the challenges you faced this morning, in being here promptly to preside over this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on bringing forward this debate on an important subject. Any MP with any minority communities in their constituency will have experienced the unfairness of these rules.

We are here to discuss the fairness, practicality and justice of the maintenance funds requirements for spouse and partner visas. Sometimes people talk about these issues, in particular in the tabloid press, as though fairness and justice in relation to migrants is not a concern of the British people. However, I was outside No. 10 last night at the biggest demonstration on Whitehall that I have seen in 30 years as a Member of Parliament. Those people were concerned precisely about the fairness and justice of the way the new American President is treating migrants, such as the complete suspension of refugees entering the country and barring people from an arbitrarily chosen list of majority Muslim countries. Sudan is on the barred list but Saudi Arabia is not, where all the 9/11 terrorists came from but, by coincidence, President Trump still has business interests. The remarkable thing about that huge and, for the most part, good-natured demonstration was that the vast majority of people who had come to demonstrate at very short notice were not from the communities affected; they were British people concerned about fairness and justice in relation to migration.

**Jim Shannon:** I know the hon. Lady shares my annoyance and concern over the way the situation was handled.

People on planes landing at airports in the States were turned away because of a decision by the President. That is an example of the harshness from President Trump and is why people protested last night and we are having this debate today.

**Ms Abbott:** Exactly. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing how the demonstration corresponds with this morning's debate. The issue is not just that they are seeking to tighten immigration rules in the United States, but the harshness, the unfairness and the arbitrary way of how it has been done. These maintenance funds requirements are another example of harshness and unfairness, and of not thinking through how the changes would operate in practice. I have no hesitation in saying that this policy and these maintenance funds requirements are impractical, unjust and counterproductive.

As other Members have reminded us, this issue is still before the courts. This is not just a question of Opposition MPs making all sorts of aspersions on Government policy. In July 2013 the High Court did not actually strike down the rules as unlawful in general, but did find that the way they are applied amounts to a disproportionate interference with family life in certain cases. Several Members have raised the issue of the interference of these rules in family life. In July 2014 the Court of Appeal allowed the Government's appeal against the High Court decision. In May 2015 the Supreme Court granted permission to appeal against the Court of Appeal's decision; it heard the appeal last year and is yet to hand down judgment.

We might think that, faced with court rulings saying that these maintenance funds requirements have a disproportionate effect on family life, any Government concerned about supporting family life might step back and review their operation. When all is said and done, however we define a husband and wife and however we define a family, strong families are one of the building blocks of our society. Whatever their concern about what the tabloid press says about immigrants on any given day, no Government should wilfully pursue policies that have the detrimental effect on family life that these maintenance requirements do.

Like many Members who have spoken, I deal with the practical consequences of these rules every week in my advice sessions. As we all appreciate, I have the difficult task of trying to explain to distraught husbands or wives that these rules exist and that because of someone's country of origin, they face this arbitrary hindrance on family reunion. In June 2013, as other Members have mentioned, a report by the all-party group on migration called for an independent review of the requirement and its impact. The Government have yet to respond to that demand.

As we know, the policy requires non-European economic area visa applicants to have available funds equivalent to a minimum gross annual income of £18,600. It is inherently discriminatory because it requires a higher income threshold in cases that include non-EEA children. It is also discriminatory because in many cases only the British and settled visa sponsors' employment income can be considered. It discriminates against women because their incomes tend to be lower, and effectively encourages family and partnership break up. As other Members have said, the Migration Observatory found that 28% of non-EEA men and 57% of non-EEA women did not

meet the threshold. Consequently, the policy hits some ethnic groups harder than others, notably Pakistani and Bangladeshi applicants.

**Mr Goodwill:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Will she say what the official Labour party policy is on this issue? Would she reduce that figure or would she abandon it altogether?

**Ms Abbott:** We would do what so many people have asked the Government to do: review this policy and put in place rules that are fair, equitable and do not inevitably lead to the break-up of families.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Joan Ryan (in the Chair):** Order. Can I just say that it is not acceptable for a Member to join the debate during the concluding speeches and to intervene?

**Ms Abbott:** The policy also discriminates against young people who have relatively low incomes. As has become clear in this debate, as a result of the impact on partnerships and families, these provisions may be in breach of fundamental human rights—the right to a family life—as they effectively split up families. The Minister asks, “What would a Labour Government do?” We certainly would not bring forward regulations that could put the Government in breach of the European convention on human rights.

As we have heard from Members from all parts of the United Kingdom, the policy discriminates regionally. Some 30% of British employees in London do not earn enough to sponsor a non-EEA spouse, and that rises to 49% for those in Yorkshire and Humberside while 51% do not earn enough in Northern Ireland—of course in Scotland it is even worse. I will say, as a London Member, that although it is relatively easier for London migrants to hit that income threshold, it is not easy in communities such as Hackney.

**Simon Danczuk:** The truth is that the policy discriminates against people who have less money—against poorer people. That is the simple fact of the matter, is it not?

**Ms Abbott:** This policy is nakedly discriminatory against poorer people. What sort of migration rules say that the poor do not have the same right to family life as the wealthy? That seems contrary to British values, as I think both parties could agree.

It is relatively easier for London migrants to meet the income thresholds, but meeting them is not at all easy in the poorer parts of London. The rules cause a lot of misery and unhappiness and result in unnecessary splits in families, as hon. Members have described. I have always been in favour of an open and frank debate on migration, but I worry about a growing callousness in how we debate the issue. It tends to the conclusion that migrants are not people like us and that they do not have feelings for their family like we do, so the importance of their family to them can then be disregarded. How can it be right that people are separated from their husbands, wives and children by the Government's regulations?

The Home Office impact assessment estimated that more than £660 million would be saved over 10 years. Anyone who is concerned about the taxpayer has to

[*Ms Abbott*]

step back when confronted with that, but that assessment has been disputed by research from Middlesex University, which says that the Government assessment takes no account of the reduced level of employment and therefore the reduced taxes as a result of discouraging both sponsors and their spouses from staying. Middlesex University estimates that the policy could cost the UK £850 million over 10 years.

In conclusion, it is long past time that we moved away from a deficit analysis of immigration that always focuses on the harms and the cost to the public purse. That has happened to such an extent that we have to make a set of rules that are contrary in principle, if not in practice, to the idea of the importance of family life. We all want, as do all our constituents—even those from migrant backgrounds—fair rules and the reasonable management of migration. Nobody doubts that, but we seem to be moving step by step into a realm of callousness, unfairness and injustice, which is counter-productive to building a good society. As many other institutions have done, I urge the Government to review how the rules work and to replace them with a set of fair regulations on income that reflect the overall impact of migration on society, which is actually a positive one. Doing so would mean that we would not have to hear any more of the tragic stories that we have heard this morning of families who are arbitrarily separated by a set of unfair and ill-thought-out rules.

10.33 am

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):**

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and indeed the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), on securing the debate. I intend to leave some time for the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East to conclude.

I will seek to respond to the points that hon. Members have made. We welcome people who wish to make a life in the UK with their family, to work hard and to make a contribution. However, family life should not be established here at the taxpayer's expense and all migrants, including those who are joining family, must be able to integrate into our communities.

The immigration rules for spouses and other partners were strengthened in the last Parliament. They have three aims. First, they tackle abuse. The minimum probationary period before partners can apply for settlement is now five years rather than two, which is a better test of the genuineness of the relationship. It deters applications based on sham marriages and the criminals who seek to profit from them.

Secondly, the rules promote integration. The minimum income threshold for sponsoring a partner ensures that they can take part in everyday life to facilitate their integration into British society. Being able to speak English is also essential and helps migrants to participate in the community and find work. That is why the rules require a partner to be able to speak basic English, at level A1, before they can come here, and to speak intermediate English, at level B1, and to pass the "Life in the UK" test before they can qualify for settlement.

**Ms Abbott:** We all share the Government's concern that people should be able to speak English. However, if the Government are really concerned, why have they cut funding for English as a second language? Why have they cut the funding available to local authorities that were helping to provide that English training, often in the context of schools or other institutions?

**Mr Goodwill:** People have to get an English qualification at level A1 in their country before they come here. I represented Yorkshire in the European Parliament, and having represented many of the communities there, I know the disadvantage that many children face when they start school—perhaps second or third-generation English-born children—if they do not speak English as their first language. Having that ability in English is absolutely vital not only for the integration of spouses, but for enabling children to progress in life. That is why we set these levels and why, from 1 May 2017, we are introducing a new English language requirement for partners applying for further leave after two and a half years in the UK on a five-year route to settlement. That will require them to progress to A2 level from the A1 level required on entry.

Thirdly, the rules seek to prevent burdens on the taxpayer. That is achieved through the minimum income threshold of £18,600 a year to be met by those wishing to sponsor a partner to come or remain here, with higher thresholds for also sponsoring dependent, non-EEA national children. It is right that those wishing to establish their family life here must be able to stand on their own feet financially. That is the basis for sustainable family immigration and for good integration outcomes.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The Minister argues that migrants coming here should stand on their own two feet, so why will he not take into account their potential earnings when they go out of their way to show that that is exactly what they intend to do?

**Mr Goodwill:** That point was raised in the debate, including by the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin). Employment income from the migrant partner will not count towards a minimum income threshold. We will not take into account the previous, current or prospective earnings, or any job offer of the migrant partner, when they apply for entry clearance to come to the UK. Employment overseas is no guarantee of finding work in the UK. Partners coming to the UK with an appropriate job offer can apply under tier 2 of the points-based system. Those using the family route to come to the UK must be capable of being independently supported by their sponsor or by their joint savings or non-employment income. When a migrant partner is in the UK with permission to work, we will take their earnings from employment here into account.

As I was saying about the rules relating to the £18,600 threshold, it is right that those wishing to establish their life here can stand on their own feet financially. The previous requirement for "adequate" maintenance meant that any sponsor earning, after tax and housing costs had been deducted, more than the equivalent of income support for a couple—around £5,700 a year—was deemed to have sufficient funds to sponsor a partner. That was not an adequate basis for sustainable family integration

and provided little assurance that couples could support themselves over the long term. That is why the minimum income threshold for sponsoring family migrants was introduced as part of the reforms of the family immigration rules implemented in July 2012.

**Simon Danczuk:** The Minister made the point that he has represented parts of northern England. Does he not accept that the threshold discriminates against people in the north of England, such as those in Rochdale and other towns and cities?

**Mr Goodwill:** I am coming to precisely that point. We have heard the Migration Advisory Committee described in glowing terms in this debate, and I pay tribute to the work it does and the analysis it undertakes before reaching its conclusions. Its report, published in November 2011, recommended that the threshold for a couple should be set between £18,600, the level at which a couple settled in the UK generally ceases to be able to access income-related benefits, and £25,700, the level at which the sponsor becomes a net contributor to the public finances by paying more in tax than they consume in public services. The lower figure of £18,600 was chosen, partly because of the points made about incomes being lower in other parts of the country.

**Jim Shannon:** I suggest respectfully and gently to the Minister that we need to consider regional variations in relation to that figure. In my contribution I referred to myself and those I know in Scotland. The threshold should fall to £15,000. I think that that is the figure we should consider for regional variations; it would adequately enable people to live in my constituency and across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Goodwill:** I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. The provisional annual survey of hours and earnings data shows that gross median earnings among all employees in 2016 were £23,099 for the UK as a whole, but they exceeded £18,600 in every country and region of the UK—in Scotland the figure was £22,918, and in Ulster it was £20,953. Incidentally, for Yorkshire and the Humber, my own region, the figure was £21,235.

That income threshold, and the higher thresholds if children are sponsored, means that the family will generally be unable to access income-related benefits once the partner and any children qualify for settlement and thereby gain full access to the welfare system. That is a fair basis for family immigration that is right for migrants, local communities and the UK as a whole.

The Migration Advisory Committee also considered the case for setting a different level of income threshold by country and region of the UK. It noted, for example, that a requirement that varied by region could lead to sponsors moving to a lower threshold area in order to meet the requirement before returning after a visa was granted, and that a family living in a wealthy part of a relatively poor region could be subject to a lower income requirement than a family living in a deprived area of a relatively wealthy region. The MAC could therefore see no clear case for differentiation in the level of the minimum income threshold between UK countries and

regions, and the Government agree. A single national threshold also provides clarity and simplicity for applicants, sponsors and caseworkers.

**Anne McLaughlin:** Surely the Minister understands that, regardless of what average earnings are, we get to the average by having lots of people who earn more and lots of people who earn less. What about the people who earn less and will never be in a position to reach £18,600? Why should their husband or wife not be able to come and live with them here, in the country of which they are a citizen?

**Mr Goodwill:** Basically, the argument behind it, to which the Migration Advisory Committee also subscribed, was that there should not be a burden on the taxpayer. The levels have been set so that people will not be liable to claim benefits. The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), speaking from the Labour Front Bench, discussed challenges in court, as did other Members. The Government's position on this issue has been supported all the way through the courts, which is why we are now at the Supreme Court, the last point of appeal.

I will touch on one or two points made during the debate. The hon. Member for Inverclyde mentioned third-party support. Promises of financial support from family and other third parties cannot be counted against the minimum income threshold. We want the couple to demonstrate that they can stand on their own feet financially, with adequate resources that are under their own control and not somebody else's. Promises of support from a third party are vulnerable to a change in another person's circumstances or in the sponsor or applicant's relationship with them.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde also raised the issue of fees. Income from application fees helps provide the resources necessary to operate the immigration system, with the remainder currently provided through general taxation. In the recent spending review, the Home Office set out its objective to work towards a border, immigration and citizenship system that is fully user-funded by 2019-20. The recent fee increase reflects this objective. Fees are set above cost recovery to reflect the administrative cost of processing an application and the benefits arising to those granted leave. It is right that fees are charged directly to users of the immigration system who benefit directly from the services provided.

**Simon Danczuk:** The Minister is doing an exceptionally good job of reading out the policy, but does he accept from all the examples given by various Members of Parliament and many others who deal with such applications that the system does not work and continually falls over for individual constituents?

**Mr Goodwill:** I am certainly more than happy to become personally involved if there are cases where we have not applied the rules correctly. Sometimes we make mistakes—sometimes documents are lost in transmission, for example. I know that the civil servants working in the Home Office who provide support to MPs are assiduous in ensuring that any mistakes that we make are quickly rectified and that the people involved are not put at a disadvantage.

**Anne McLaughlin:** I mentioned Christine, my constituent, who is now unable to meet the minimum income threshold because both of her elderly parents are sick and she is their carer. She is saving this country thousands of pounds. Probably the correct rules were applied, so I am asking the Minister not to do what he has offered to do—intervene when the rules have been applied incorrectly—but to consider making an exception in the case of Christine, who could do with her husband being here and who has selflessly given up the potential to earn enough money in order to look after her parents. Will he consider looking into her case and making an exception?

**Mr Goodwill:** I will certainly consider the case, and I would welcome a meeting with the hon. Lady so that she can explain it in more detail.

Under the rules, the income from employment of the UK-based sponsor can be counted in one of two ways. The person must show either that they have received the level of annual income relied on from employment held for at least six months at the date of application, or that they are currently in employment earning that level of annual income and have earned that amount from all employment undertaken in the previous 12 months. That provides some flexibility for those who change employment. It also gives us some assurance that the person is qualified for and can hold down employment at the level of income relied on. We otherwise risk being presented with applications based on earnings that do not accurately reflect the employment capacity of the person concerned. In order to maintain the integrity of the system for all applicants and sponsors, we need rules in place to prevent that.

The rules also take into account a wide range of other sources of income for the couple and their cash savings. Since July 2012, many changes have been made to the rules to enable more sources of income and savings to be counted and to introduce more flexibility on the required evidence. For example, cash savings, which otherwise must be held for at least six months prior to the date of application to help show that they are under the couple's control, can now include proceeds from the sale, within that six-month period, of a property or investments owned by them.

The rules do not take into account the employment prospects of the migrant partner or a job offer to them, as I mentioned; employment overseas is no guarantee of finding work in the UK. However, when they get here, they can contribute to the family income and meet the rules in that way. The couple can rely on accommodation provided by a third party. The minimum income threshold reflects average rent, so that the couple can be expected to make their own arrangements later if need be. The immigration rules for spouses and partners have been upheld as lawful by the courts.

I was looking forward to hearing what the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson would have to say on behalf of the official Opposition. I had rather hoped that she would fill some of the vacuum that seems to be Labour's immigration policy at the moment. She talked a lot about US immigration policy and criticised our policy, but she failed miserably to propose concrete alternatives that would be operable and maintain our wish to counter those who seek to exploit the UK with sham marriages. Hopefully things will become clear at some point between now and the next election.

**Jim Shannon:** In my contribution, I asked the Minister a question, which I think I saw him take note of, about those who are applying to come to the United Kingdom. Can their income in the countries they work in be part of the equation? I ask him to look at that and, if necessary, come back to me and to all hon. Members present with an answer in writing.

**Mr Goodwill:** I am happy to have another look at that rule but, as I have already mentioned, the fact that a person has a job abroad is no guarantee of employment here in the UK. However, if that person arrives in the UK and works, their income contributes to the family income and will be taken into account.

We continue to keep the immigration rules for spouses and partners and their impact under review. There were 28,443 partner visas granted in the year ending September 2016—a decrease of 26% from the 38,355 partner visas granted in the year ending September 2010. Our overall assessment is that the current rules are having the right impact and are helping to restore public confidence in the immigration system. I am grateful to have had the chance to hear the views of hon. Members on these issues.

10.50 am

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. They have made some incredibly powerful and heartfelt contributions on a whole range of troubling issues, including the ridiculous income threshold, the crazy evidential requirements that too many applicants have to meet, the cost of applications and the processes involved—we could even throw in the ridiculous appeal times that too many people face. There is also a chicken and egg situation with visit visas: people are refused a spouse visa because they are a few hundred pounds short of the financial threshold, and when they apply instead for a visit a month later, they are denied it because the Home Office does not think that they will leave again. It really is a horrible situation, and too many people are left in it.

The Minister is a very engaging chap; he is always open to meetings, and I absolutely respect him for that. He inherited these rules—that is his unfortunate position—and he has done his best to defend them, but the Government's arguments are indefensible. Once again, they are operating at the extreme—other Governments are not doing this. What is more, the Government are completely out of tune with public opinion on the issue. If you went out into the street right now, Ms Ryan, you would struggle to find anyone who thought that an £18,600 threshold was a reasonable way to calculate who should be allowed to come and join their family here. Most people would find it totally outrageous that somebody's job offer or potential earnings could not be taken into account towards the target.

These rules are, essentially, the Prime Minister's; she introduced them and she made these migrants subject to the net migration target. What does it say about the Government that they have an official target that encourages the Home Office to pursue and implement policies that reduce the number of husbands, wives, children and parents able to come into this country? That is little short of appalling and shocking. I hope that the Minister or the Home Secretary will take away the powerful

critique made by hon. Members today and will tell the Prime Minister that it is time to stop hurting families and children.

Like other hon. Members here today, I think that the rules need to be fundamentally rewritten. I will make one final ask of the Minister: will he think again about the refusal to take applicants' prospective earnings into account? A commitment was made in Parliament, not by the Minister's immediate predecessor but by the incumbent before that, to look at that again. It is the most ridiculous of all the rules, and I hope that it, at least, can be looked at anew.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered immigration rules for spouses and partners.

## **Bus Services: Solihull**

10.54 am

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered bus services in Solihull.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan.

Reliable and accessible public transport is vital for many of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Older and less mobile residents in particular often depend on buses to get out and about, and everybody benefits when shops and social clubs are within easy reach of as many residents as possible. That is why it is so important that bus operators ensure that they take proper account of the needs of those who need their services most, and not just of profit or general convenience, when designing their routes and timetables.

Those of us who are fit and well or who usually drive to work or the shops sometimes do not realise what a lifeline public transport is for older and less mobile residents. Even an apparently minor change in a route or in the location of a stop can cause real difficulties for the people who need a service the most, but too often the rest of us do not realise that. Unfortunately, in my experience, neither do some of the bus operators.

I am campaigning for residents who have been let down by bus operators on two routes in my constituency. The number 37 bus runs from Solihull station into Birmingham. Last summer, National Express rerouted it away from Olton station in the north of my constituency, in response to concerns about congestion. Although the new stop at Warwick Road is not terribly far away on a map, it has made the connecting bus and rail journey disproportionately more difficult for those who are least able to find other ways of getting into Birmingham. I have written regularly on the subject, both in the local press and directly to National Express. I have met Peter Coates, its chief executive for the west Midlands, and have attended public meetings to hear residents' concerns at first hand. I can tell the Minister that those public meetings were full to the rafters, such are people's concerns.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate, because this is a huge issue. He mentioned public meetings. Several routes have been pulled in our constituency; our meetings about them have been the most widely attended of all the public meetings I have held.

The routes are being pulled because they are not viable. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to look at some kind of cross-borough co-operation, to give assistance to people from rural areas who are looking to go shopping in our towns and cities or trying to get to work?

**Julian Knight:** I am very aware of the difficulties that my hon. Friend describes. They mirror the experiences that we have had in Solihull, including a lack of transparency from some operators and a lack of engagement from others. I absolutely agree that a cross-borough approach between north Warwickshire and Solihull, where our boroughs meet, is important. I

[Julian Knight]

know that there are west midlands programmes, but our reaction to them is often a little borough-specific rather than cross-borough.

My office has organised a petition, which I will present to the House shortly and which will indicate the strength of feeling in my constituency about the reroutings. As a result of our efforts, some temporary bus stops have been installed closer to the station, but while that eases the inconvenience for people who can easily walk the rest of the way, it does not solve the problem for elderly and disabled people.

The route shift started as a trial, apparently because congestion around the station was causing regular delays, but I have since been told that it will be staying in place. Obviously nobody likes it when a bus is delayed, but surely operators should try to find more realistic timetables for accessible routes, rather than making their services more difficult to use for those who need them most. I have had representations about that from many people in my constituency who have disabilities.

Another service in my constituency, the S11, has also been redesigned in the name of efficiency without proper care having been taken to protect the interests of its users. The S11 and a couple of connecting services have been shortened to save money and make them more reliable, but they now bypass several residential areas: Hampton Lane, School Lane and Grove Road, which now have no direct connection to the wider public transport network. Once again, that is not the end of the world for someone who can easily walk to the new stops, but it creates much more serious problems for less mobile residents. I myself have had a difficult experience of late; an unfortunate accident meant that I was unable to cover any real distance by walking. It gave me a real insight into the difficulties that come from just trying to cover short distances. Unfortunately, Transport for West Midlands has told me that it cannot act, as the route is privately run.

The S11 situation highlights how much privately run services depend on a good and responsible operator. Unlike National Express, the company running the S11 route, Diamond, has been very difficult to engage with. That is a key point. At least National Express has been willing to talk to and engage with a parliamentarian—myself—and with local councillors and the wider community. However, I have genuine concerns about Diamond. I have been lucky to get a single response out of the company, despite having written to it about residents' concerns at least 10 times. I am also sorry to say that when Diamond ran a consultation—a fact-find, if you like—on this issue, it chose to do so on a Saturday morning, a time when the elderly residents to whom the bus service is so important use it much less than they do during the week.

All of that suggests that Diamond is more interested in ticking the boxes than in engaging seriously with users' concerns. I will clearly name Diamond and say that at this moment in time it is effectively failing the people of Solihull, in the provision of services and—more crucially—in these key consultations and fact-finds.

My team and I are still taking action. I have written about this issue several times in the local press and we are distributing hundreds of leaflets about petitions, to make sure that people have an opportunity to make

their views known. If Diamond will not do this consultation, I will try to do it for Diamond, and I will present the results to Diamond at every given opportunity. When the operator refuses to engage and is not accountable to any public authority for its decisions, it is really an uphill battle for local communities to put across their views and concerns.

That such small changes to just two routes could have these effects highlights how important local bus services are to some of the less mobile, and often less visible, members of our community. I have no reason to doubt that every bus route in my constituency goes through neighbourhoods where people depend on it to provide a vital link to the rest of the town. When neighbourhoods lose their link to the wider community, it is not just those neighbourhoods that lose out; local businesses lose customers or potential employees, while sports teams, social clubs and charities have fewer members and volunteers.

That is another important point. In Solihull, we rely on a sea of volunteering. I was at a dinner the other night where I was told that up to 800 charities are based in Solihull. I run a scheme—a “points of light” scheme—to recognise those groups. If someone is volunteering, by definition they are doing so for free, but they need to get to their place of volunteering, and it is much more difficult for them to do so if the buses and the wider transport links are not in place.

A better connected community is better for everybody in it, and we all have a stake in making sure that our town is as accessible as possible. That is why it is so important that bus services are run well, and that those who run them are accountable to the people who use them.

I am not one to get misty-eyed about the prospect of the Government running services directly, or one to hark back in time. A good operator can often move more quickly than other bodies to put things right when there is a problem. I mentioned National Express earlier, showing the company in a poor light, but one area where it has engaged with people is in redesigning the timetable of the No. 31 bus after I wrote to say how schoolchildren were being left to wait at the school gates for 45 minutes for a bus home, which I believe was also a very serious safety issue. National Express took that on board and actually made the correct changes to the timetable.

We must always make sure that operators live up to high standards, are responsible, and are responsive to local concerns when they make decisions about routes and timetables. The networks that they run bind our communities together, and their profits—and, yes, the convenience of sprightlier bus users—cannot be their only considerations. Basically, we need to work from a base of considering those who are least mobile and who need bus services the most in order to get around.

11.4 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** Thank you very much, Ms Ryan, for calling me to speak. I think that this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this debate about bus services in Solihull. I can assure him that I am very keen to support his aim of improving those services.

My hon. Friend eloquently described just how important buses are to communities. They are indeed a “lifeline” and without them it would be impossible for many people to get to work, to access public services, including health or education services, or simply to go shopping or socialising. I was particularly struck by his points about the amount of volunteering that takes place within Solihull, that volunteers need transport to do their volunteering and that our communities all benefit from the work of volunteers.

It is important to note that more than half of those people who rely on bus services outside London do not have access to a car. Buses play a vital role in our economy; with 4.4 billion passenger journeys last year, buses are by far the most popular form of public transport. They are way ahead of rail in terms of passenger journeys.

Customer satisfaction with bus journeys is very high, with 86% of passengers satisfied with their service. That picture is consistent across the country and it has been so for many years. Under-21s make up about a third of bus passengers and bus use among older people is increasing as a result of the national concessionary fares scheme. So buses are critical across the country, as my hon. Friend articulated when speaking about Solihull.

It is because of their importance that we are committed to improving bus services, and expenditure on buses reflects that. I will make a couple of comments about support for buses as a whole and then I will make some suggestions, specifically to respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend. I just want to put the comments that have been made into some perspective.

This year, the Government will spend more than £1 billion on the concessionary travel entitlement, and my Department provides more than £240 million in direct subsidy to bus operators and local authorities in England, to help them to deliver local services. Bus services in England outside London are deregulated and it is indeed for commercial operators to determine how, where and when their services operate. About 80% of the bus services in our country operate in this way. Local authorities have powers to subsidise services that are not commercially viable but which they consider socially necessary. Again, however, that is a local decision and it is up to local authorities to decide which services they will fund.

Local bus services must also be registered with the traffic commissioner who has responsibility for such services. The commissioner can take enforcement action against an operator if its service does not run reliably.

**Julian Knight:** The Minister is obviously making some very good points, but much of this process relies on a two-way engagement. Unfortunately, I have found that often there is only a one-way engagement; the operator says what will happen and it happens.

**Andrew Jones:** I agree that communication must be two-way; if it is not two-way, then it really is not communication. So my hon. Friend is correct about that and I will say a little more about engagement in a moment.

A traffic commissioner can take enforcement action if an operator does not operate its service reliably. Nevertheless, whoever provides bus services, it is important

that operators and local authorities ensure that the interests of passengers, and consequently the interests of the wider community, are taken into account when any changes to bus services are being considered.

I also agree with my hon. Friend that good customer service includes proper consultation. He mentioned that a consultation event took place on a Saturday morning. That would have suited some people, who might be at work during the week, but it will not have suited everybody. A company must ensure that it engages everybody—all those who will be affected by any changes—in a proper consultation, and then take any concerns into account.

Passenger Focus has produced best practice guidance on how a company should consult when it makes changes to local bus services. It includes four key principles: collate, which basically means that the company should formulate its proposals; consult, which means the company must consider when to consult, what to consult on, who to ask and how to carry the consultation out, making sure that it captures all the local information; consideration, which means the company must go through and assess all the responses properly; and communicate, which means the company must communicate its decision to all those who are affected. So collate, consult, consider and communicate—happily alliterative, which I am sure is no coincidence. The basic principles are clear and the bus companies should be operating them, up and down our country. I urge all bus companies and anyone making or considering making a change to bus services to follow that excellent guidance and adopt those principles.

**Craig Tracey:** I take on board the Minister’s point, but those are best practice principles and in many cases that is not what is happening. Does he accept that? For example, the 116 route in Kingsbury was pulled with the minimum amount of notice, which left my constituents unable to get to work because there was no alternative service.

**Andrew Jones:** I indeed accept my hon. Friend’s good point. He has raised this issue as a vigorous champion for his area on several occasions. When we do not see that best practice happening we are right to hold bus companies to account, in representation of our communities. That is our job here. We must stand up for people who need bus services and who, although they do not necessarily have the sharpest elbows, must have their voices listened to.

My Department, and through it the Government as a whole, is taking action to support transport within communities in many other areas, and I would like to mention a couple of them that will, I think, be of interest. At present, each year about £2 billion of public funding for transport services is provided by a number of agencies. For example, we have the £250 million a year that is spent on the bus service operators grant, which the Department for Transport provides to bus operators, local authorities and community transport organisations on the basis of the amount of fuel consumed—a pence per litre rebate. The Department for Communities and Local Government provides £317 million a year to local authorities to support socially necessary bus services. The £1 billion a year spent on home-to-school transport is provided to local authorities by DCLG. The £150 million a year spent on non-emergency patient transport is provided by the NHS to individual local clinical commissioning groups.

[Andrew Jones]

That significant amount of funding comes from different sources but it needs to be spent in a joined-up way. Historically, it has not been spent in that way and that provides us with an opportunity. We have, therefore, launched a concept called “total transport” and provided a budget of £7.6 million to fund pilot schemes across England to explore how our public services can work together to provide a better transport service—how councils, the NHS and other agencies can jointly commission transport services with greater efficiency. The idea involves: avoiding the duplication of commissioned services; allowing networks to be designed so that they complement each other; reducing administrative costs, potentially by centralising commissioning; enabling the skills of professional staff, such as those who are scheduling the networks, to be deployed across all the services; and, most importantly of course, achieving overall cost efficiencies, and through that ensuring that services are more viable and that a better footprint of travel and transport is available to our constituents. We have been running 37 pilots on the idea for almost two years. I have met with some of the operators around the country and it is heartening to see the enthusiasm with which they are participating and taking on the opportunities. That is happening across the country and will be of much interest to colleagues.

A further area that always attracts interest from colleagues is the community transport sector. Providing transport solutions also requires the effective use of all options, and this could be relevant to the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Solihull and for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). It could be a traditional fixed-route bus service, a community bus, a dial-a-ride or another type of demand-responsive transport, such as taxis. The role played by community transport operators is vital in linking individuals and communities to existing transport networks, work, education, shops and services. In recognition of that contribution and important role, the Government launched a £25 million community minibus scheme to help to buy new vehicles for local community transport operators, with a bit of a bias towards more rural areas, where transport can be thinly stretched. The funding will help, among others, elderly residents and people with learning and physical disabilities.

**Julian Knight:** The point about community transport is very important but it is not about just rural areas; it is also about areas of likely demographic demand. For example, in Solihull’s Silhill ward, from which the town gets its name, 40% of residents are aged 65 and over. When I first started campaigning to be elected as an MP, we had a real battle on our hands to keep the dial-a-ride services. It is fantastic to think of rurality, but demography should also play a major part in the process.

**Andrew Jones:** This is another occasion on which my hon. Friend and I are in full agreement, and I have just learned the origin of the word Solihull. He is clearly correct. I mentioned rural services simply because transport can be a bit more stretched in rural areas, but there is a requirement for transport everywhere—those who need it are all over our country and in every constituency.

I am delighted to say that more than 300 local charities and community groups across England will receive new minibuses in round one of the community minibus

scheme—we have had delivery of more than 200 already. We have been able to secure funding for a further round, applications to which closed in December. The Community Transport Association UK is administering the scheme for us. That is an additional £2 million to provide a further set of vehicles for these impressive organisations.

The bus market is a deregulated one, and it has not changed much in its regulatory form for many years. However, the Bus Services Bill has completed its journey through the upper House and will shortly enter our Chamber. The deregulated market for buses has worked very well for much of our country, but we must recognise that in some areas it has not always responded effectively to the changing needs of the population or taken passenger needs properly into account. That has resulted in insufficient service co-ordination and sometimes poor ticket integration and ineffective on-road competition.

I want to build on the success of the bus market and the strong companies that are out there working to deliver buses, but I want to encourage more people to use them. The Bus Services Bill is designed to put more passengers on to buses. When we set about drafting the Bill that was the aim we had in mind—to improve services and increase passenger numbers. The Bill provides tools that will help local authorities to achieve that aim. It is an enabling Bill that will create a suite of powers to allow local authorities and combined authorities to choose what is right for their area. The powers include new and enhanced partnership provisions, which will allow local authorities to work with bus companies to agree their own standards for services in an area. That is the model that is most likely to be adopted.

When I have talked to councils and combined authorities around the country, they have been very tuned in to the Bill and to the opportunities it presents. Nearly all of them have focused strongly on how partnership will be able to improve their services. That is pretty likely, because when we look at the bus market and at which bits of it are growing strongly, it tends to be those areas where we have good effective partnership between the entrepreneurial spirit and determination regarding customer service that we see from so many bus operators, and the effective planning and co-ordination that can come from local authorities.

I recognise that partnerships will not necessarily be the best solution everywhere. In some cases, the market will be working well and nothing will need to change. If it is not broken, it does not need to be fixed, and there is an opportunity for the status quo to continue in the Bill. In some areas, we intend to allow local authorities, particularly combined authorities, to use new powers to franchise bus services in their areas—like the system in London. Franchising will enable authorities to specify the services that passengers want and to deliver an integrated network of services. Private operators will compete for contracts and deliver those services. It is not a suspension of the market, because competition would move from the kerbside to the tender. That will be a feature of the bus market in a couple of areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull detailed how he has communicated with his local bus company, Diamond, but not had the response he desired. That is not acceptable. As he has built a reputation here as a vigorous champion for his area in general and for buses in particular, it is more than fair to say that he should get an adequate response from important local providers.

I will write to Diamond's parent company, to say that we have discussed the issue in the House, that we regret the level of engagement locally and that we ask it to sort it out.

I have been to Birmingham to meet the West Midlands Bus Alliance. I attended the launch of the Swift card, and I have my Swift card here. I have no doubt that local authorities in the area see buses as a key part of public transport provision. They are champions for buses. I have been most encouraged, hearing about their transport plans and how they want to work together. The outlook is positive, I hope—I have been encouraged by their work so far—but I will highlight my hon. Friend's concerns to them to ensure that they are sighted on the issue, too.

In summary, I hope I have been able to demonstrate that the Government are committed to maintaining and improving bus services in all areas. We are taking an imaginative approach to the co-ordination of public services. We are supporting services through extra Government grants and working to bring forward a regulatory regime that will enable greater planning and greater co-ordination, all of which will put the bus customer at the heart of the marketplace. We want to see bus services thrive, whether in the largest cities or the most rural villages. The point is that buses matter, and we want to see more people using them to ensure we get all the benefits that my hon. Friends have so clearly articulated.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.22 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Severn Bridges

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future operation of the Severn Bridges.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I welcome the select band of hon. Friends who are here today, while other business is on in the main Chamber.

On 13 January the Government announced their consultation on the future management of the Severn bridges. We were promised it in the autumn, with the Government saying it would be about a year to go until the handover, but better late than never. I have called this debate in part to recognise that the Government have moved some way towards recognising how hard hit we in south Wales have been by the level of tolls, although they have not gone far enough—I will move on to that later—but also, crucially, to get more clarity from the Minister on what the Government are planning when, at long last, the Severn bridges concession ends. We need that clarity because there is not long to go now; Severn River Crossing could reach its revenue target in October this year and the Government consultation ends on 10 March. Now that the concession is drawing to a close, this is the first opportunity that Members have had in 25 years to shape the new regime for the benefit of our constituents and businesses.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the moment to have a strategic plan? Action on the inequity of the tolls is long overdue, but we also need to look at the future of the jobs for those who work in the toll booths and at the general management of traffic, bearing in mind the proximity of the Brynglas tunnels. There has to be a strategic approach.

**Jessica Morden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a critical stage to get this right for the future. Given the inflexibility of the 1992 legislation, it is important that we scrutinise the plans now and future-proof them so that we will not need to unpick things in years to come, for example because we had not thought about vehicle categories. That is a very important point. We must be able to shape the new regime for the benefit of our constituents and businesses. I agree that we will want to get that right.

**Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate again; she has had many debates on the topic and I have made the same observation, but I want to say it again. Does she agree that the need to get this right for the business community extends way beyond south Wales to the west of Wales, mid-Wales and the north as well? It is critical that we get this right for businesses right across the country.

**Jessica Morden:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; this issue has ramifications for the whole economy of Wales, in south Wales and beyond, including his constituency. I thank him for being here today and for making that point.

[*Jessica Morden*]

Getting more clarity about the direction of travel is important for my constituents who commute, the businesses that do business across the bridges and those who work on the bridges. In recent years those people have had to suffer the highest toll in the UK, and commuters have just had to absorb the annual increases, however unfair they are. Constituents have had to turn down job offers because the toll is equivalent to nearly an hour on the minimum wage. Just this morning I received an email from a constituent, who said:

“The tolls add a considerable amount to the cost of travel to Bristol, where a lot of attractive jobs for young graduates like myself exist. Many of my friends who have graduated from university recently and are looking for a job fail to look at Bristol because in my opinion, the toll gives...the impression that Bristol is out of reach, even though in actual fact, travel time is not much more than to Cardiff.”

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for the campaigning she has done on the issue, along with so many of us. She is absolutely right to mention Bristol. I have heard again and again from businesses and individuals in my constituency who trade across the Severnside area, particularly in the creative industries. We have people working in the BBC drama village in Cardiff Bay and the BBC natural history unit in Bristol. Does my hon. Friend agree that sorting out the tolls is absolutely crucial to growing and strengthening that creative economy?

**Jessica Morden:** My hon. Friend is right. House prices in Bristol mean that more and more people are choosing to live in Severnside, Monmouthshire and Newport and to commute. Our local economy is interlinked with Cardiff, but also with Bristol. It is incredibly important that we do all we can to support that growth.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and making a powerful argument for reducing the tolls across the Severn to Bristol. Does she agree that we must also improve train services between east Wales, Bristol and the west country? That would also help jobs in our area.

**Jessica Morden:** I thank my hon. Friend. He anticipates a point that I was going to make later in my speech about cross-border travel and the capacity of our rail services for those who commute to Bristol and beyond, which is clearly inadequate. When we are looking at tolls, we need to consider the wider picture and take a more holistic view of our transport networks.

Businesses, especially those in logistics and the provision of services, are trying to compete with firms in the south-west that do not have to factor in the toll, and they are losing out. Some businesses in my constituency are hit by up to half a million pounds a year, which just has to come off the bottom line. At present there are no effective discounts or incentives for off-peak travel. The arguments have been well rehearsed over many years, but it is worth reiterating just how hard people have been hit and therefore how strongly they feel about the issue.

The Severn crossings are a key link in our transport and economic infrastructure as part of the M4 corridor—the gateway to Wales—which allows access to markets

in the UK, but also as part of the E30 route. As has been said many times before, the Severn tolls have been a tax on Welsh business and commuters. I recognise that the Government have gone some way towards acknowledging that. They announced in January that tolls could be reduced to £3 for cars and vans and £10 for lorries when the concession ends, but the message from many of my constituents and businesses is that the Government are not going far enough.

I want to thank the many constituents, businesses and groups, such as the Freight Transport Association, that have worked with me, other hon. Members and the Welsh Affairs Committee over the years on this campaign. I also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who attended the Severn bridges summit that I organised with the FTA here last year, so that the people affected could put their views to him directly.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) mentioned, we should also pay tribute to the maintenance and toll staff, who are incredibly hard-working and knowledgeable about the Severn bridges. I hope that the Minister will ensure that they have a key voice in future decisions, because they have the expertise that we need and that we must keep. I urge him to ensure that there are regular meetings with management and staff so that they are fully informed of announcements and discussions. We should acknowledge that it is a sensitive time.

On tolling, the Government have announced that they will seek to reduce the tolls and that they will use the toll revenue for operations, maintenance and debt repayment. The Minister will be aware that there is a strong consensus in the Welsh Assembly, the Welsh Government and among many users of the bridges that the tolls should be scrapped altogether, not least because removing them would boost productivity in Wales by up to £100 million, as a recent Welsh Government study has shown. Tolls represent an unfair tax. In an ideal world the UK Government would pay for the maintenance, not the people and businesses of Wales, particularly after such a lengthy period with such eye-watering tolls.

Scrapping the tolls would be a symbolic move, especially with the uncertainty around Brexit. It would be helpful to hear from the Government why they have not included that option in the consultation. I am sure that many people would like to back it. I hope that the consultation is a true one, not just a paper exercise, and that the Government have an open mind on it.

**Mr Mark Williams:** The hon. Lady touches on a point of principle there. The people of Wales pay taxes the same as everyone else. That money goes towards road repairs right across the country, so why should the people of Wales in effect pay twice?

**Jessica Morden:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which I will come to later when I talk about the debt that the Government say they have to recoup. That is interesting, given the money they have recouped in the past from other sources.

The Minister will say that halving the tolls will allow an assessment of the impact on traffic. The traffic using the bridges has increased and, as recent media coverage shows, many people are choosing to relocate from Bristol and the south-west to Newport and Monmouthshire as

a lifestyle choice—a very good choice, as it is an absolutely wonderful place to live. In response, the UK and Welsh Governments need to work on a holistic transport plan that includes the metro, and the Government must help to make up the shortfall from the loss of EU funds. While I am being parochial, the Government should support a new station bid for Magor and provide greater rail capacity, especially on the commuter services from Newport and the Severn tunnel junction, which have been dubbed the “sardine express”—I have had debates on that in the past—and the Welsh Government should look at the matters that are devolved.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way. I agree with her point about rail. I and others have been campaigning for a new station at St Mellons Parkway—I hope the Minister will be listening closely, because the decision is going to be taken—and for funding for the south Wales metro. Does she agree that the tolls are not only a tax but a time penalty for Welsh residents, because unlike the Dartford crossing and the M6 toll, which have much faster technology—Dartford has got free flow—we do not have free flow or the faster toll technology on the bridge?

**Jessica Morden:** I absolutely agree, and I will come to the issue of free flow later. The fastest transaction at the moment is the TAG, which takes six seconds, but there is further scope for helping with congestion.

Will the Minister tell us where the figure quoted in the public consultation of a 17% traffic increase over 10 years has come from? How much of that will be in the first year? In fact, it would be particularly helpful if he could publish all the research that the Government have commissioned on traffic modelling in relation to the end of the concessions and the traffic flows. I know that all hon. Members would be grateful for that.

If, as the consultation indicates, the Government decide to continue tolling, the toll level should not exceed the cost of operating the two bridges. Severn River Crossing collects about £90 million-plus each year, and that is going up. Maintenance and operation costs are between £13 million and £15 million. Based on a rough, back-of-the-envelope calculation, that requires a toll of about £1, which means the Government will still be charging three times more for cars and 10 times more for lorries. The Government argue that they will have to recoup a £60 million debt for fixing defects but, as the Welsh Affairs Committee has documented, they have done very well out of the bridges so far: the Treasury has received £154 million-plus since 2003 in unexpected VAT—more than enough to cover the debt and undertake the resurfacing work, which the Government value at £12 million, with a lot left over.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), why do we have to pay for resurfacing on this stretch of road out of bridge tolls, when for any other stretch of road the cost is taken out of general taxation?

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. On that point, if one of the many other bridges in the UK failed—God forbid—it would be repaired by the Department for Transport. Does she agree that the Government should be responsible for repairing both Severn bridges?

**Jessica Morden:** I agree with my hon. Friend—I agree with everyone. That is clearly something the Government should take on board. Given that they have absorbed the VAT charges into the general Treasury coffers, surely we should be dipping into the Treasury’s coffers to pay for the resurfacing work.

The Government have recouped a substantial pot of money. We should not forget that they wiped £150 million of debt from the Humber bridge. Wales deserves the same. Has the Minister estimated the date by which the outstanding Government debt will be paid off? I understand that, under their current plans, it could take 18 months. Is their intention to reduce tolls at that point to reflect that?

Will the Minister tell us how the Government calculated the £3 figure? There is no rationale for how it was reached, and it would be really helpful to have a breakdown to know how the tolls will be spent. Will the Minister confirm what ongoing method will be used to calculate the tolls in future? The consultation does not make that clear, and we need to know how the Department for Transport will assess the tolls annually, because we have suffered years of annual increases.

It is also crucial that we know from the Government when the new tolling regime will come into force. We are currently no clearer about the expected timing of the handover of the crossings. It is anticipated that the revenue target will be met in October, and that the actual transfer of services will occur at some stage after that. What is the current plan? It is important that we get clarity about the handover period and know when the bridges are formally to be run by the Department for Transport. If there is a gap, and VAT comes off the bridges but the tolls remain at the current level, there will potentially be a period when businesses that claim back their VAT will, in effect, have to pay more. Have the Government given any thought to that?

The Department for Transport said that it is a year to go until handover. When does it expect that date to be? Does that mean, for instance, that if the formal handover has not taken place by January 2018, we will have to endure yet another retail prices index increase next year?

The mention of free flow is welcome, but many will be disappointed that it may not be seen for some years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said, the main benefit is the reduction in journey times and congestion. Although free flow is clearly a future consideration, I ask for two things: first, that under free flow the tolls will not go up for a return journey; and secondly, that all back-office functions for dealing with evasion and administration should be sited locally. It would be an advantage for free flow if those who carry out the back-office functions know the local area and the local issues. Will the Minister give us some clarity about the Government’s current estimate of the costs of free flow?

Free flow will be looked at in future, but what thought has been given to improving the TAG? It is the fastest current form of payment—it takes about six seconds—but it is important to improve it if we are to tackle congestion. Severn River Crossing has made strenuous efforts to promote the TAG, and nearly 30% of users now use that method of payment, but only an improved season TAG discount and a first-time trip TAG discount beyond a halving of the toll will materially affect TAG take-up.

[*Jessica Morden*]

With that in mind, will the Government consider a more ambitious future for the TAG to speed up traffic in the short term?

I am pleased that the long-awaited consultation has been published. I will certainly encourage all those with an interest to contribute their thoughts to it.

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Probably every Welsh MP has some sympathy with the points that the hon. Lady is making—not necessarily with all of them, but certainly with some. As she is drawing to the end of her speech, may I ask her about a point of principle? Is she against the whole idea of using a tolling mechanism for constructing new bridges and roadworks? Is the Opposition's view that there should not be tolls and that we should always fund new road improvements from the Exchequer?

**Jessica Morden:** I think that, after many years of pretty eye-watering tolls on this bridge, it is time we looked for a much fairer regime for people who live in south-east Wales. The tolls have hit my constituents and businesses especially hard. As I have said, there is a strong call, supported by the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh Government, to scrap the tolls altogether, and I have huge sympathy with that. If this Government are not willing to go that far, as indicated in the consultation, we should surely have a £1 maintenance-only toll.

**Nick Smith:** It seems to me that we need some transparency from the Government about the finances, because at the moment they seem very opaque. We have got to find out what is happening with the treatment of VAT, with the future debt costs, and with the resurfacing and maintenance costs. We need the Government to be absolutely clear about what the costs are so that the public can take a view about whether it provides value for money.

**Jessica Morden:** My hon. Friend is completely right. More clarity would be most welcome so that, when statutory instruments are introduced on the matter, we are far clearer about what the effects will be. The consultation contains more detail about the options that are not being considered than about those that are on the table. It says that Highways England will have the responsibility in future, but will it contract out any elements of the operation or maintenance of the bridges? What maintenance charges, other than for the resurfacing, do the Department for Transport anticipate for the bridges in the first 18 months?

The consultation mentions the option of removing tolls between 10 pm and 6 am—off-peak travel—but does not seek views. Will the Government speak to businesses and others to gauge their views? Business representatives I met in my constituency on Friday said they thought it would be extremely attractive to companies based in south Wales, particularly in the logistics industry, so more work should be done to pursue that option.

To conclude, the Severn Bridges Act was written almost 30 years ago. As we have said many times, it was an inflexible piece of legislation that was not future-proofed. I have one plea for the Minister: whatever legislation we have to pass—the consultation made mention of statutory instruments—we as local Members should be consulted

properly. We and our constituents need to be able to take part, because in the months to come we will have many more detailed questions, although I hope that the Minister can answer some today. I appreciate other hon. Members supporting the debate and I look forward to their contributions.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Moving from Newport East to Newport West, I call Mr Paul Flynn.

2.50 pm

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Davies. I think this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship. I am sure it will be a pleasure.

Many congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). For the entire parliamentary career of her predecessor, who was first elected in 1965, this was the dominant issue. If we look back over the years to see how we got into this position, as early as 1936, there was a Bill to build a bridge across the Severn, but to our great shame it was opposed by Newport Council, which did not want one built.

There was, however, the misery of the Beachley-Aust ferry, which I can vividly remember crossing on in the late '50s in my Mini. I do not know whether anyone else can remember it, but it was a terrifying, nightmare experience—we were packed in such that we could not open the car doors once stuck on the ferry, which followed a zig-zag course across the turbulent waters of the Severn that were rushing past. It was an incredibly hazardous journey, but with huge queues to get on the ferry, so the people of Wales were prepared to take anything to get a bridge there and see the disappearance of the ferry.

A deal was therefore struck, but in later years it became clear that the fragility of a single crossing made a second one necessary. I do not think any Members present were in Parliament at the time, but in 1992 another deal was done. What was put in law, however, was clear. A formula was agreed and the Severn Bridges Act 1992 stated that, once the obligation was paid to the company, bridge tolls would cease. That obligation will end either this year or early next year. The bridges will come into public ownership and will be in exactly the same position as any other part of the motorway system. They should be treated accordingly, as my hon. Friend said. The Humber bridge had £150 million of debt written off, but the Severn ones need a much smaller amount, and it should be written off, making the bridges part of the national, multi-billion-pound bill for all highways. The bridges are in no way different from any other stretch of motorway.

I find the Conservative party's treatment of the reduction in tolls distasteful. It had to come—it is in the 1992 Act that the tolls have to stop, and it would be illegal not to do so. If the Government do not stop the tolls, there will be a legal challenge, as has been suggested in the Welsh Assembly. That is the legal position. A wonderful picture in the *South Wales Argus* had a trinity of Tories, all grinning widely, lined up against a background of the bridges. The local MP and the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Transport were all trying to get across this confidence trick: "We're going to lower tolls for you. We generous Tories are going to get the tolls down—they won't be £6.70, £5.70 or even £4.70; they will be £3.70." That was what the Government said.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing this important debate. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) agree that rail electrification to Swansea not yet materialising and Government reluctance to reduce greatly or scrap the tolls indicate a reluctance by the Westminster Government to support the economy and its vibrancy in south Wales?

**Paul Flynn:** Absolutely, because both those things would have a major effect. It is a matter of great regret that the Government have not been inclined to spread the very welcome electrification of the railway that far. Certainly, economic vibrancy means everything. The cost of the toll is not huge given other motoring costs that we pay—buying a car, insuring it, fuelling it—but it is a psychological barrier for Wales. It seems to be in the way, and people see it as a great disincentive to business and leisure traffic.

To get back to the trinity of Tories posed by the Severn bridge, £3.70 was the figure they were quoting. I challenged the Secretary of State for Wales about that, because he described £3.70 as a 50% cut. A well-known conclusion about opinion polls is that 50% of the population do not understand what 50% means, and we can include the Secretary of State among those people because in no brand of mathematics is £3.70 half of £6.70. The next week the new rate was announced, with the huckster, the snake-oil salesman, saying, “No, not £3.70, it’s going to be £3”—but no reason why—“or, better than that, £1.50, but, sadly, both ways.” That is how this confidence trick is being sold to the people of Wales and the west of England.

There is no case for continuing with the tolls. If the Government are going to charge £3, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East asked, how is that figure reached? In no way can all the costs be put together and multiplied, even with extra costs added here and there, to get to a figure of £3. The Welsh Affairs Committee investigated, and its figure was an absolute maximum of £1.50, which was very generous in allowing for how things would be run and all kinds of new arrangements for the TAG system. Will the Minister tell us what makes up the £3? I believe that most of the costs are for running the bridge itself—costs that would disappear if the Government abided by the Severn Bridges Act and got rid of the tolls altogether.

For 50 years, the people of south Wales and the west of England have been double taxed. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) said, we are all paying our taxes—we pay for roads throughout the country in the same way as everyone else does—so why on earth should we have to pay twice for our local road? The toll is almost unique now, with few others left. The Government should sweep away any debt and take the bridges into the roads spending budget.

You will remember, Mr Davies, from your reading of Welsh history and your deep knowledge of religion, this passage from Genesis, at chapter 24, verse 60:

“And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.”

That verse, in an interesting part of Welsh history, is the reason why the Rebecca riots started. For those less well versed in Welsh history, what happened was that between

1839 and 1843 the Hosts of Rebecca were formed, when men dressed up as Rebecca—a bit of cross-dressing, which was rather unusual at that time in that part of Wales—to charge against the toll gates and destroy them. The toll gates, owned by alien landlords, were barriers to the free movement of goods and people, so the Rebeccas destroyed them. It is time for the Hosts of Rebecca to be revived. We remember their cause, because we now have a similar situation: a Tory Government are out to disguise a rip-off as an act of generosity.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend speaks with the greatest eloquence, as ever, and his example is one for readers of *Hansard* to enjoy. Does he agree that given that we have had to wait for electrification, that we do not have clarity about new stations and that there is still this chokehold over the Severn bridges, which is coming off a little but not nearly enough, many people in Wales—particularly south Wales—look at the Government’s support for High Speed 2 and think, “We’re being treated differently from the rest of the UK”?

**Paul Flynn:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I wish the Government would not try to pose as generous people who are giving us a gift. Those three grins should be wiped off the faces of our trinity of Tories.

**Glyn Davies** *rose*—

**Paul Flynn:** I thought that might excite the hon. Gentleman. I will give way in a moment. We must get through to the reality of this: it is not an act of generosity or a cut; it is a rip-off.

**Glyn Davies:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to interject in his colourful presentation. I read an article by Lee Waters, a Labour Assembly Member who is concerned about reducing the tolls. I do not think he voted against doing so in the Assembly, but he certainly made a lot of public comments acknowledging that one consequence of cutting the tolls completely would be far less spending on other considerations that he thinks are important. Does the hon. Gentleman have any sympathy at all with Mr Waters’ views?

**Paul Flynn:** Mr Waters takes a view that is very much on the side of the environment and so on, but the vote in the Assembly to get rid of the tolls was unanimous. I do not know what Mr Waters has said, but it is the unanimous view of the Welsh Assembly that the tolls should disappear altogether. We want to hear from the Minister how the £3 figure is made up. How much of it is the cost of running the tolls? How much of it would disappear? We need the answers today. We have been far too tolerant for so many years in putting up with double taxation in south Wales.

**Chris Elmore:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his quick canter through the history of the Rebecca riots, which are a fascinating part of our proud Welsh history. He is talking eloquently, as usual, about the impact on people—our constituents—but there is also a massive impact on business. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) talked about businesses in the city that they both represent. In my constituency, there are large-scale companies such as Rockwool and Northwood & WEPA Ltd. The latter produces toilet roll—we are a proud toilet roll-producing constituency—and travels right across the United Kingdom. The toll is

[Chris Elmore]

a double tax on business. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West agree that that has a negative impact on bringing new start-up businesses to Wales?

**Paul Flynn:** Absolutely. It is a mega-disincentive to all forms of activity and commercial life. It is seen as a problem at the docks in Newport and in every other industry. Take the leisure trade: do people go on holiday in Cornwall or face the obstacle of the bridge and possible hold-ups there? I am sure that it is a disincentive to all commercial activity in Wales.

I was part of agreeing the deal in '92, and I think the only person who objected to it was a Member who wanted to bring the toll up from £4.90 to an even fiver. Other than that, there was unanimity in Parliament at the time that we had to face the issue, we needed another bridge and we would put up with the misery of paying tolls for it until a specified time. That time will be up this year. The debt that we owed to the Severn bridges company will be discharged. It has made its money. The bridges are ours. Let us treat them in the same way as every other piece of road in the motorway system.

3.3 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing the debate. She has pursued this issue rigorously for years, and her contribution was once again principled and enlightening. I am sure that the people of Newport East and indeed Wales as a whole will have been pleased to hear their views so well represented. As we have heard, the Severn bridges tolls have a significant impact on their lives, their businesses and the wider economy of Wales.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on a characteristically colourful contribution, which I am sure will echo down the airwaves. I have a vivid picture of him in his Mini trying to address the challenges of the Severn. My first car was a Riley Elf, which was a similar kind of vehicle. I am glad that we live in the 21st century. I enjoyed his account of the Rebecca riots, which I have not recalled since I was a history undergraduate. It all came back to me, and I am sure we will be able to use that in future debates, too.

Other hon. Members made powerful interventions. We heard important contributions about double taxation, the importance of listening to the staff who work on the bridge, which my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) raised, and the sense of disadvantage that is felt in Wales.

This debate is timely. As has been explained, it is projected that Severn River Crossing plc will have generated the revenue that was originally agreed—£1.029 billion in July 1989 prices—by late 2017 or early 2018. The concession period is drawing to a close, the crossings will soon revert to public ownership, and now is exactly the right time to look again at the tolling regime, challenge it and change it.

As my hon. Friends have made clear today and on other occasions, many businesses in Wales believe that the Severn crossings tolls impede business activity across the bridges by deterring inward investment in Wales.

The tolls, which are among the most expensive per distance travelled in the world, are a deterrent for small businesses hoping to operate in the south-west of England, for example. Hon. Friends have made the point about potential links with Bristol.

The Department for Transport is currently consulting on reducing the Severn crossings tolls and related issues. It proposes in its consultation document that tolls on all vehicles will be at least halved, while tolls on buses and small vans will be reduced by more than 75%. We would welcome a reduction in tolls, which would particularly benefit small business owners using small vans, and we would also welcome VAT no longer applying. The Department also proposes to replace the existing legislation with a charging order and replace tolls with charges, which would make them easier to reduce. Other options under consideration include the introduction of a free-flow electronic charging system, the levying of charges in both directions rather than a charge being applied to only westbound traffic, and the removal of charges at night.

The Department for Transport has said that the crossings cost approximately £15 million per annum to operate and maintain. The Government have also stated that they need to recover costs of £63 million from work that they funded to address the original bridge's latent defects, such as corrosion of the suspension cables. But as has been pointed out, similar debt was written off for the Humber crossing, so why not for this one? That work has already been paid for through general taxation, and people entering Wales should not be forced to pay for prior expenditure associated with the Severn bridges. The Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure pointed that out, and also said that

“the tolls should be removed at the earliest opportunity, alleviating the burden on the economy and removing the significant threat they represent to trade in a post-Brexit world.”

Indeed, the National Assembly for Wales last year voted for the Severn tolls to be abolished, but the power to do so is not in the Welsh Government's remit. In 2010, the Welsh Affairs Committee recommended that the charge be reduced to a maintenance-only toll, which, as we have heard, would stand at around £1.50. Neither option is being consulted on.

The Department for Transport says:

“The Severn Crossings are a key link in the economies of South Wales and the South West of England, and continue to foster the economic and cultural landscape of their surrounding areas.”

That is quite true, but why does the Department not therefore look at the research commissioned by the Welsh Government that suggests that removing the tolls could boost the south Wales economy by more than £100 million a year? Although it is encouraging that the Department proposes reducing the charges and keeping them under review to see whether they can be reduced further, we believe that all options should be considered and be part of the consultation.

We are pleased that the Government are consulting on the introduction of free-flow toll technology on the Severn crossings—that could help to reduce congestion, which is projected to grow—but that needs to be introduced at the earliest opportunity. We saw how long it took even to implement card payments at the crossings. It is also worth pointing out that congestion management problems should not be dealt with simply by maintaining

charges that will deter people from using the crossings. The Government also said in their consultation that charges would be used only for maintenance and operation of the bridges. Will the Minister confirm that no profit will be made from the new charges and that they will not be used for general revenue generation for the Treasury?

The Severn bridges are of strategic significance to Wales. At a time when the UK faces economic uncertainty in the light of the vote to leave the European Union, I am sure the Minister has listened intently to the hon. Members here today. They have made their points well and they know best what should be done to promote the Welsh economy both at home and abroad when the crossings return to public ownership.

3.10 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

Dickens said:

“An idea, like a ghost...must be spoken to a little before it will explain itself.”

The hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) has certainly spoken to and about this idea on many occasions, including today, and I congratulate her on taking the opportunity to make the case that she has made before once again. Relatively recently, in July 2015 in this Chamber, she raised these issues and asked the Government to do many things. I will address as many of those issues as I can in the time that I have available. As is inevitable on these occasions, I have a pre-prepared script written for me by my officials, which will inform me, but I will not be constrained by it. As I have said before, I feel it is important in Westminster Hall debates to answer the points made by hon. and right hon. Members and not simply to parrot what I could have said regardless of their contributions.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I am sure that is very welcome.

**Paul Flynn:** Will the right hon. Gentleman elevate himself to a star in the political firmament by abandoning his pre-prepared script and answering the debate? It would be a rare and delicious experience for us.

**Mr Hayes:** I was hinting at that already and I have done so many times previously. Although I would not claim to be the shiniest of stars, I am starlike—at least, that is how I would describe it. In that spirit, I will deal with some of the—I will not say inaccuracies because that would be too unkind—exaggerations in the hon. Gentleman’s grasp of history. Let us start with when the tolls began. He brings—I do not blame him for this for a second—a certain tribal prejudice to these things and he ascribed the tolls to those he characterised as Tories. He knows, however, that the tolls were first introduced in 1966.

I wonder whether any Member present in the Chamber could remind me of who was in government in 1966. I recall that it was a Labour Government who, when the bridge was first opened, cemented tolls as a means of partly funding the cost of the development. In fairness to the hon. Member for Newport West, he said the Welsh would have accepted any deal at all, but he did not say that they would have accepted any deal from the

then Labour Government, and tolls began at the inception and have continued since. The Chamber will recall that it was a Conservative Government that pegged the tolls in 1992. You will remember the 1992 Act, Mr Davies, which says the tolls can rise only in line with the retail prices index. Indeed, they have risen since then by only that amount.

Before I move on to the main substance of my remarks—I do not want to short-change any hon. Member by not dealing with the specific questions that they raised—I have one other historical matter to deal with. The Rebecca riots, which began in 1839 as the hon. Member for Newport West said, concluded in 1844, as he will also know, for several reasons. It is true that extra troops were deployed to dissuade those who were rioting from taking action against the tolls; it is true, too, that many of those who were causing disturbances resisted the violence that some of their compatriots recommended; but it is also true—the hon. Gentleman will want me to fill the gap and add to the quality of his account—that criminal gangs became involved in the riots. They used the disguise of the original complaint of the rioters to engage in all kinds of malevolent activities. That is the full account of the Rebecca riots for those who are interested in the history of such things and want an unabridged, uncorrupted and balanced account of those events.

**Paul Flynn:** It depends how we look at history. I once read a book that asserted that only the future is certain, but the past is always changing. We have just seen an example of that and of somebody rewriting his own history. However, it is a matter of great honour and pride to us in Newport that in 1839 the last Chartist riot took place in order to set up a republic. We have week-long celebrations every year. That is our view of history and the Chartist riot was contemporaneous with the Rebecca riots. It was a glorious start to socialism in this country and throughout Europe, and something of which we are very proud. Of course, there is a black history interpretation whereby people with a Conservative mood of mind try to fictionalise those great events, but they were heroic and it is time to bring them back.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I confirm this is in order because it is a bridge to the future.

**Mr Hayes:** I did not want any historical inaccuracy—I have used the word now—to stand on the record uncorrected. I know you would not have wanted that either, Mr Davies.

I want to turn now to the specific matters relating to the Severn crossing. The hon. Member for Newport East generously acknowledged at the outset that we have begun the consultation that was promised previously. In the debate that I referred to in 2015, she referred to “the need to offer some light at the end of the tunnel for my constituents.”—[*Official Report*, 21 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 436WH.]

That is part of the reason why she secured that debate then when she sought further progress on the character of tolls, which I will try to address today. She will know that the current consultation invites contributions on a range of issues, many of which have been raised here. It is a real consultation, and we are genuinely open-minded about how we move forward. The Government have made some proposals, as was also said. None the less, to

[Mr John Hayes]

be meaningful, the consultation has to respond to consultees' ideas and thoughts. We have not come to any predestined conclusion, and I will take into account the various comments that have been made.

I want to deal with five matters. First, on the amount of the toll, the hon. Lady and other hon. Members will know that we have proposed effectively to halve the toll by reducing it to £3. She will also know that that will be welcomed widely by regular users of the route, for any reduction of that scale and size is bound to be welcome. However, the hon. Lady asked for more detail on traffic flows. That is a perfectly reasonable request and I will make more information available following today's debate. It is important that we gauge the effect on traffic flows of any changes we make both in the toll and in the way it is collected.

There were changes to traffic flows—I discussed this before the debate—when we changed the tolling system at the Dartford crossing in Kent. We believed that if we could automate the process it would improve the flow of traffic and ease congestion and so on. If we were to make that change at the Severn crossing—we are consulting on that and people will offer views—it is important that we gauge the likely effect on the convenience of travellers. The hon. Lady is right to ask about that and details will be provided.

The hon. Lady also asked us to break down costs in greater detail, and that is also a reasonable request. There are a variety of costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), who always speaks with great authority on all matters to do with Wales—indeed, on all other matters as well—said that a balance has to be struck. A perennial debate on river crossings—bridges and other structures—is how much the Exchequer and the user should each contribute. That debate continues almost wherever some fee or charge is made. It is easy to describe it as double taxation of those concerned but, my goodness, we could say that of any charge that is made for any public service. I do not think that we should want to characterise every charge made to every taxpayer as double taxation. That would be crude and even—dare I say—a little crass.

**Glyn Davies** *rose*—

**Jessica Morden** *rose*—

**Paul Flynn** *rose*—

**Mr Hayes:** I will give way first to my hon. Friend.

**Glyn Davies:** Does the Minister accept that many, like me, will be concerned about the issue? A huge number of road schemes in Britain are in need of development, for the benefit of the relevant parts of the country and the economy. That is hugely important—it is vital. However, if we cut off the possibility of part-funding through user contributions, we will not be able to provide all those schemes. I use one in the west midlands every time I go home. It will be damaging to the British economy if we take a view that there must be no tolls at all.

**Mr Hayes:** That was the point that I was making—less concisely and persuasively than my hon. Friend. As I said, the debate is perennial; we have such a debate

about nearly every kind of fee or charge, for every public service. I suspect that the answer—and I hate to sound tediously consensual—is that a balance has to be struck.

**Jessica Morden:** Tolling at £3, in part, to pay back the £63 million cost to the Government of the latent defects on some of the bridges, when the Government have in fact recouped more than double that in an unexpected tax windfall, seems especially unfair—particularly when the Government stepped in and wiped £150 million off the Humber debt. Does the Minister appreciate how strongly people feel about that?

**Mr Hayes:** The reason I said I wanted to break down the costs is that, as the hon. Lady will understand, as well as a capital cost to be recouped in the form of a debt, maintenance costs are associated with any crossing of this kind. She will be familiar with the details of the Severn Bridges Act 1992, which makes it clear that those costs can be included in any tolling system through to 2027. The operational, maintenance and servicing costs are real, and are borne by those who pay for the crossing through tax and tolls. As I have described, a balance has to be struck, and that is why the Government are engaged in consultation in response to calls from the hon. Lady, among others.

Having been slightly unkind to the hon. Member for Newport West, I will mention that he has longer and more profound experience in this context even than that of the hon. Member for Newport East—certainly than mine; I pay tribute to the fact that both hon. Members have been consistent in advocating their constituents' interests in making their case about the crossing. I hope that they, in similar good faith, will recognise that I will do my best to bring about a reasonable and fair outcome to the consultation, which will guarantee the interests of all concerned into the future.

**Paul Flynn:** How was the £3 figure arrived at? What are its components? Past examinations have suggested that there is no way that future costs would make it anything like that. Is not it true that the Wales Office has lost out to the Exchequer? The Treasury has said, "We want to continue to use the bridges as cash cows for as long as we can."

**Mr Hayes:** The £3 cost brings the charge much more closely into line with the Humber estuary, the Dartford crossing, and so on; but none of those figures is magical or derived from a mystical process. They are designed to reflect the real costs of running the crossing—the operational and maintenance costs and the capital costs over time. I have already conceded in the third of my five points—you will remember, Mr Davies, as you follow such things assiduously, that I said I would make five points—that I would break down the costs further. I am happy to do so, in the interest of being straightforward in this debate and in the consultation.

It is true that businesses on both sides of the Severn have long called for reductions in tolls—thus our response, in the form of the consultation. The crossings will of course return to public ownership early in 2018, so this is the right time for what we are doing. The main proposal is to abolish the toll category for vans and small buses and halve the tolls for all vehicles. That 50% reduction should not be disregarded and I know that the hon. Member for Newport East would not want it to be.

**Jessica Morden:** The Minister just referred to the handover in January 2018. Can he be specific about the date? The consultation ends on 10 March. Presumably in October a car will drive through the Severn bridge toll plaza and the revenue target will be hit; what happens then? Potentially, with a handover period, businesses that can now reclaim VAT might be unable to do so. If the handover is not until January 2018 will there be an increase then, as there has been every year?

**Mr Hayes:** The hon. Lady is right to say that we need to set out the process, and that responsibility will pass to Highways England. The fourth of my five points is that it is important to be clear about how Highways England will manage the process. She asked particularly whether others will be involved and Highways England will contract the responsibility. That will of course partly depend on the results of the consultation. If we move to a free-flow system, like the one at the Dartford crossing, it will have implications for organisation and management. Fewer people will be involved at the crossing and more behind the scenes, and there will be advance booking as happens at Dartford, with an account-based system that will hopefully help traffic flow. That will require us to set out, following the consultation, the further steps necessary for the handover. I am happy to do that, but I do not want to pre-judge the consultation.

There are arguments for maintaining cash payment; I will be blunt about that. When we debated Dartford, the first time I was in the Department for Transport, we considered that closely because a cash system is simple and straightforward; but there are disadvantages—particularly the delays. Evidence from places in this country and abroad shows that automated systems can be highly effective, can be properly managed, and can offer considerable benefits, particularly to regular and business users. We will set out the transition process and it will to some degree depend on what we do about future toll collection.

The fifth point that I want to make is to express thanks to those involved over time in managing and maintaining the crossing. It is right that in any changes that take place we recognise the contribution that people have made to running this important crossing, which is a vital piece of UK infrastructure. It has benefited road users from England and Wales for 50 years, it is used by more than 25 million vehicles each year and it has provided road users and businesses in England and Wales with exceptional savings in time and money since the first crossing helped to connect the economies of both countries in 1966.

I enjoyed the story about the ferry, although I am not sure I was meant to enjoy it. It sounded like a hazardous—indeed tortuous—business, and I imagine that those who can look back on that will recognise just what a difference the crossing has made. As we now consider the next steps, it is important that we take account of the effects they might have on all of those involved in the process, and I wanted to do so publicly.

Let me summarise my response. I repeat that we have no preordained view about how this matter should unfold. It is important that these debates inform thinking, and they certainly do in my case. There is a strong argument for making as much information available as

possible to Members of this House and more widely along the lines requested throughout the debate across the Chamber, and we will do so.

If the debate does no more than all of that, it will have achieved a great deal, because it has persuaded this Minister—if he needed persuading—not only of the importance of the matter but that we need to move ahead with as wide agreement as possible about the kind of tolls charged, the effect they have on people, the methodology that we employ and the steps we will take to manage that process. All of that will happen, and the hon. Member for Newport East can be proud of yet again representing her constituents and others so admirably.

As a postscript, the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Newport West can be pretty sure that my references to the pre-written script were as slight as the hon. Gentleman had hoped.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** We will finish where we started: I call Jessica Morden to wind up briefly.

3.32 pm

**Jessica Morden:** Thank you for ably chairing the debate, Mr Davies. My thanks to all hon. Friends who took part and in particular my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). May I thank the Minister for his response and in particular the points about the staff who work on the Severn bridges, whom I mentioned?

I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out forcibly that we do not feel that the Government are being generous in their offer. For years, excessive tolls have been charged to people making essential journeys and we feel strongly that it is time to right that wrong. I worked out that this is about the 87th time I have spoken about the Severn bridges in my time here in questions and at other times. As the concession is nearing its end, the impression is that the Government have been dragging their feet. For instance, we expected the public consultation last autumn and it has taken its time.

**Mr Hayes:** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady. I have spoken already, but I omitted to pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). Were it not for him and his role in this matter—I mention him because he answered the debate last time round—I do not think we would have moved as quickly as we have. He has been determined to ensure that we responded properly to the hon. Lady's concerns. It is not I but he who deserves the credit for any progress that has been made.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** That sets a precedent—an intervention on a wind-up.

**Jessica Morden:** I appreciate the Minister's intervention. I thank him for his comments, but I am not sure whether we are that much clearer about the breakdown of the £3 toll. I will hold him to his promise to break that down for us in more detail.

I am also not sure whether we are that much closer to understanding the handover plan. The Department for Transport clearly cannot take over the bridges the minute the last car pays up and the revenue target is reached, so it would be useful to know about that, not least because I would not want constituents to face another annual

[Jessica Morden]

increase in January 2018. I would also like more detail from the Minister on what can be done about the TAG reduction.

I hope that this time we end up with a lasting solution that means we can future-proof the legislation. Will the Minister respond in writing to anything else we have raised in the debate? That would be particularly helpful. As in all our efforts in talking about the Severn bridge tolls, we do so for our constituents, our businesses and the wider economy of south Wales, which have been hit hard by the tolls over the years.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered future operation of the Severn Bridges.

3.35 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Duodopa

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered access to Duodopa.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank the Minister for sparing the time to respond to this limited debate this afternoon. The subject is a serious one, especially for those people who contend with advanced Parkinson's disease and have so few effective medications on which they can rely to give them some control over their symptoms.

For the benefit of anyone who might not be familiar with the condition, I will briefly explain what Parkinson's is. Parkinson's disease is a degenerative neurological disorder. It affects all aspects of daily living, including talking, swallowing and writing. People with the condition often find it hard to move freely, but there are also other issues, such as pain, depression, dementia, hallucinations and continence problems. The severity of symptoms can fluctuate from day to day, and people can experience rapid changes in functionality in the course of a day.

There is no cure, but there is a small selection of treatments suitable for a few people in the advanced stages of the condition. Those treatments include the drug Duodopa. I was involved in the campaign to allow routine prescribing of Duodopa without recourse to special, case-by-case requests by clinicians. Since 2015, the treatment has been available to those people in England who are deemed suitable.

I called today's debate to discuss the new proposal by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to advise clinicians not to offer Duodopa at any stage. That recommendation is being made despite the scarcity of treatment options and the proven effectiveness of Duodopa. I accept that the Minister has no control over NICE recommendations, but I wish to highlight some anomalies.

First, in clinical practice, Duodopa is used only when all other interventions have been shown to be ineffective, or clinically unsuitable options. Despite that, evidence presented in the draft guideline compares Duodopa to deep brain stimulation, which is another treatment for advanced Parkinson's, and to the best medical treatment, which for advanced Parkinson's is often apomorphine.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively. As a result of the background information that I got in relation to this issue, I would like to ask this question: does he agree that the evidence from clinicians and experts that NICE made a pivotal mistake in comparing Duodopa to treatments such as deep brain stimulation means that the institute needs to step back now and withdraw the proposal before even more anxiety and turmoil is caused to people with Parkinson's?

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I will come to that point later and respond to it.

That incorrectly assumes that the populations given the treatments are the same, which is not the case, as UK clinicians recommend Duodopa only if their patient cannot have deep brain stimulation or apomorphine. It is therefore illogical to say that deep brain stimulation or apomorphine is better value for money, as they are not suitable for direct comparison. As one person with Parkinson's explained,

"I was at the end of the road before I had the Duodopa. I was literally wheeled into hospital to have the pump fitted and the Duodopa titrated, and about a week later I came out walking. I responded very quickly and noticed a huge improvement in my quality of life, and I always live in dread that it will be taken away."

In these circumstances, I very much hope that something can be done to bring NICE to the mainstream view on the subject.

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I have been involved for 15 or 20 years in supporting Parkinson's disease patients or those living with Parkinson's disease, and I think it is terrific that Members of Parliament initiate debates that raise its profile, raise awareness and ask the Minister to come before us and share views on where we are. I therefore congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing and introducing the debate.

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his kind words and support.

This issue is of great importance to a relatively small number of people, but given that the treatment is currently available through NHS England, to withdraw it on the basis of an apparently flawed assessment would cause concern among a much wider community, as it might be seen as setting a precedent for decisions on other treatments in future. I would welcome the Minister's comments on that.

Secondly, although it is well known that Duodopa is more expensive than some other therapies, it is not offered to everyone, and we believe that some of the economic modelling does not take into account the discounts that the manufacturer offers NHS England.

Duodopa was classified by the EU as an orphan treatment, meaning that the number of people for whom it is a suitable treatment is fewer than five in 10,000. There are known issues with using standard health technology assessment methodology to evaluate the efficacy of orphan medications—issues that are thought to place orphan medicines at a disadvantage compared with treatments in more widespread use.

In Scotland, Duodopa was considered by the Scottish Medicines Consortium and approved on the basis of its processes for evaluating orphan treatments. NICE concluded that for Duodopa the cost per quality-adjusted life year—the generic measure of the value for money of medical interventions, based on quality and quantity of life lived—was more than £500,000, but the SMC concluded that the cost was less than £80,000 when using a calculation appropriate for an orphan drug. Indeed, a recent parliamentary question revealed that, from July 2015 to December 2016, just 75 people in England had been given Duodopa.

Thirdly, if Duodopa treatment is denied, that means there will be increased costs from social care and other things on which the person with Parkinson's will become dependent, to say nothing of the quality of life or

dignity of that person, which cannot be so easily reduced to a monetary figure. As Professor David Burn, the national clinical director for the UK Parkinson's Excellence Network, has commented:

"To not offer Duodopa as a treatment option is putting people with Parkinson's in England at a disadvantage compared with other developed countries."

I acknowledge that the Department of Health has no direct control over NICE, and I recognise that NICE needs to be independent of political considerations. However, since NHS England has in recent years determined that Duodopa can be routinely used for patients where appropriate, and both NHS Scotland and the SMC consider the treatment to be appropriate, NICE appears to be out of step with the prevailing opinion. Specifically, I look forward to the Minister's guidance on what options are open to the Government when the basis of a proposal made by NICE is so flawed. The consequences of these proposals going ahead would be catastrophic for the dozens of people for whom this drug was their last resort, and would add pressure to an already buckling social care system.

4.10 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Edward. I add my congratulations to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) on securing the debate. It is right that we use the opportunity to discuss matters such as this one in Parliament and to ensure that we, whether that be NICE or the Department, get this right.

May I start by agreeing with the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall? He made the point that it would be completely wrong for NICE to make an evaluation based on flawed data, flawed information and a flawed methodology. If that were the case—we will talk about that during the next few minutes—it would require action. He also made the point that it is right that we have a body such as NICE that attempts to validate the treatments that are available in a coherent and consistent way.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the quality-adjusted life year issue. There has to be a method of comparing drugs that are available, for example, for Parkinson's with those available for cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy, and we have to be fair to the community as a whole. That is what the NICE process is intended to do. It is also important to make the point that at the moment, the drug is available in NHS England. It has been commissioned since 2015 by the specialised commissioning team. That will continue—the updated NICE guidance will not change it—until NHS England's specialised commissioning group makes a different decision, if that is what happens.

I will make a few points about Parkinson's first of all. We know that it is a terrible, progressive disease and that there is no real understanding of what causes it. The occurrences of it are rising. Some 130,000 people in England have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which is caused by the death of a type of cell—those containing dopamine—in our brains. As the hon. Gentleman said, the disease causes tremors, stillness, slow movement, speech impediment and so on. Of

[David Mowat]

those 130,000 people who are suffering from Parkinson's disease, something like one in 1,500 are given Duodopa. There are currently 75 people in England who receive it, and the cost is roughly £28,000 for each of them.

The process is that when a diagnosis of Parkinson's is made, NHS England typically refers the patient to a specialist centre for neurological care and an evaluation. A set of processes are carried out by the neurosurgeons in an attempt to remedy the dopamine issue that will have caused the Parkinson's. The typical and main treatment is a drug called levodopa, but for a number of people there are side effects and it eventually stops working. As a follow-up remedy, as the hon. Gentleman said, either apomorphine, brain stimulation or Duodopa is prescribed, or a combination of those three things. How they interact with one another is quite complex, but those are the typical prescriptions if the main treatment is not successful.

As I said, the cost of Duodopa is something like £28,000 per patient per year, and 75 people are receiving it, so that is around £2 million a year, which is not massive in the great context of NHS spend. Nevertheless, it is important that we compare it with other treatments and make sure that it is the most effective for patients. That is what NICE has done. It had previous guidance on the treatment of Parkinson's from 2006 and over the past year or so has produced draft guidelines, which the hon. Gentleman referred to, on the use of the drug. Those guidelines were put out to consultation, which closed in November. It is true, as the hon. Gentleman said, that those draft guidelines said that in NICE's view, at no stage in the treatment is Duodopa to be recommended. The reason given was that, under NICE's evaluation criteria, the cost of the drug is too high.

I have the NICE report in front of me, and the actual analysis is quite complex. The hon. Gentleman said that the report talks about the figure of £500,000—or alternatively £80,000, as I think I heard him say—per quality-assisted life year. I think it also comes up with lower numbers, but the truth is that it does not come up with a number that is anything close to the normal threshold at which a drug is approved for use, which is typically £20,000 to £25,000 per quality-assisted life year. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the methodology that was used. The consultation process drew in points from members of the public, from the profession and indeed from the company that markets the drug, which did say that there were methodology issues—I think it used the phrase “issues with the mathematics”. Those points will all be referred to the NICE committee and will be taken into account if and when the final analysis is confirmed or changed.

However, I will say that a quality-assisted life year figure in the order of £80,000 is quite a long way away from where it needs to be. There are various remedies for that. In similar debates I have made the point that one option is for the drugs companies involved to review their pricing. These things are not necessarily set in concrete. When they price a drug they are doing two things, and the cost of actually manufacturing the drug is often quite small compared with the invested intellectual capital that they are trying to recover. There is a choice, because if the drug is not prescribed they are not recovering either of those costs. I simply make the point that there is an opportunity for the company to do that.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is true that NICE's recommendation is that a combination of apomorphine and deep brain stimulation is more effective as a treatment and in terms of cost. We are having this debate on the draft guidance, and even if that guidance is confirmed, it will then have to go to the NHS England specialised commissioning group, which will have another opportunity to look at it in the round. As he said, Duodopa is a little unusual in that it is currently being prescribed. It is not as though it is a new treatment—it was prescribed in advance of the NICE recommendation.

I will say a little bit about NICE. It is very easy to knock it and say, “These guys don't know what they're doing. They don't understand what is going on. It is obvious that if they were a bit more diligent or a bit better trained they would not have given this answer.” I looked at who was on the committee for the Parkinson's guidelines. There were 18 people; it comprised consultant neurosurgeons, neurology pharmacists, people from patient groups and physiotherapists, so there were a number of people with a great deal of experience in managing Parkinson's disease. It is important that the decisions on how we make drugs available are made by scientists, based on rigorous criteria and an attempt to look at the science rigorously, and not by Members of Parliament, as I think everybody in the Chamber would agree.

**Glyn Davies:** I intervene only to reinforce the Minister's point. I remember being involved in campaigning against NICE and calling it out for everything I could when bowel cancer drugs were not available. That was driven by my personal interest, but in time I have come to realise—partly because my son who works for a drug company lectures me about this—that the principles behind NICE are absolutely vital. If we ever move away from that, we will finish up in a complete free-for-all, with all sorts of pressure and inducements from Members of Parliament not to follow proper procedure.

**David Mowat:** I can only concur that many of us benefit from lectures from our children, and it is nice to know that my hon. Friend does. I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall. If NICE has made a mistake, if something has been wrong in its analysis—this is why draft guidelines are published—and if things are brought to its attention that are not adequately reflected in its work, it has the opportunity to change that and will do so. Given the points that we have just heard, that is the right process.

When the finalised position is established, NHS England will consider whether to accept the NICE guidance. It will make a decision on what it does regarding the cohort that receive the drug and new patients, for whom there is potentially a difference in treatment. That process is many months away, frankly. It will not occur until NICE has finalised its guidance and published the complete position.

I finish by agreeing with the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire. These decisions are very difficult. Only 75 people receive the drug, but for them it is potentially life-changing, as it would be for the people who will need it in future, and I do not want to underestimate that. I can only repeat the points made in the NICE guidance; it believes that there are other equally effective treatments, such as a combination of apomorphine and brain stimulation. I am not a

clinician, so it is not possible—and not right—for me to have a view on that, other than to say that until we are able to show that NICE has somehow been wrong in what it has done, it is right that we as a Parliament and as a group of MPs accept and respect that process, because we know that diligent scientists and clinicians have tried to get it right.

I thank the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall for raising this important subject; it is good that we have had the chance to talk about it today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Statutory Sex and Relationships Education

4.24 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered statutory sex and relationships education in all Government-funded schools.

I am very pleased to have secured this debate, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. As hon. Members on both sides of the House may know, this issue has been close to my heart for some time. I have been campaigning for improvements in sex and relationships education for several years. Actually, I think we should call it relationships and sex education, because I believe that the focus should be on equipping children and young people to establish healthy relationships and to build their self-esteem and self-worth.

One of the best examples that I have seen of great relationships and sex education was in a Catholic primary school, where children were learning about the body and about the clothing that people wear and why. The lesson looked at modesty and why certain parts of the body are special, private areas. It was done with parents being fully included in the lesson's design, using the correct names for the parts of the body but in a safe and age-appropriate way. That is the type of age-appropriate, quality relationships education that I would like to see in all our schools and not just—sadly—in the few where a headteacher understands its importance and devotes time to it being taught well.

Under the last Labour Government, I had the honour of serving as Schools Minister during the passage of the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010. That happened in the final months before the 2010 general election and I regret that the Labour Government had left it so long to make important changes to sex and relationships education. By that time, it had become apparent that sex and relationships education in our schools urgently needed to be improved. The vast majority of parents—88%—told us that they agreed, and so too did the vast majority of children and young people. A wealth of educational specialists—the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Brook, the Sex Education Forum and the Terrence Higgins Trust—all recommended at that time that the legal requirements on SRE should be strengthened.

Under the Education Act 1996, only maintained secondary schools were required by law to teach SRE and even they could get away with providing it only in science lessons. Three quarters of young people told us then that consent was not being taught even once during those lessons. One in seven pupils could not recall receiving any SRE at all. The guidance on the teaching of the topic, dating from 2000, clearly needed to be updated.

To address that, we planned to teach students much broader lessons covering a lot more than just the narrow biology of sex and what fits where. We felt that students needed to learn about healthy relationships in the broadest context, about being kind and valuing themselves and the other person, about self-worth and building up self-esteem, and about how they talk to and negotiate with one another. We felt that the issue of consent particularly needed to be addressed, that it needed to be spelt out clearly that physical and mental threats were not acceptable in any relationship and that no one should have to do anything that makes them uncomfortable

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or frightened. We also believed that young people needed to understand about keeping safe, which is especially important for younger children at primary school, and as children got older and became teenagers, to learn about sexual assault, rape and sexual harassment, and to understand what that meant. Should the worst happen, they needed to know whom they should approach and what they could do.

We argued that all that should be taught under the umbrella of a broader subject: personal, social, health and economic education. The Education Act 1996 needed to be amended so that all taxpayer-funded schools, including primary schools and academies, should be required to teach it. We wanted it to be statutory to ensure that teachers would then be required to have the proper training that they needed to deliver the subject well.

We agreed that although parents would still be able to opt their children out of most of the lessons if they wished—it is certainly worth noting that, as the law stands, a parent can withdraw a child from sex education up to the age of 18, even though the age of consent is 16—we negotiated with religious faiths such as the Catholic Church, so that we would guarantee that every child got at least one year's teaching in SRE before they turned 16.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): Does the hon. Lady concede that schools are currently obliged to follow section 78 of the Education Act 2002? That is about promoting

“the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society”.

**Diana Johnson:** Of course, some schools do that very well, but I want to ensure that all schools—whether academies, free schools or primary schools—provide that level of education to equip our children and young people for what life will throw at them. We need to strengthen provision. That is my issue.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate and raising these issues. In respect of the previous intervention, it is not inconsistent with anything that she has outlined in her remarks to teach all young people about sex and relationships. Whether people are having sexual intercourse in a marriage or outside marriage, they need to know about how to interact properly in a relationship, with all that that might entail. That is a valuable point; it does not contradict previous legislation.

**Diana Johnson:** I accept that. It does not contradict it; it builds on it. That is where I want things to go. All the evidence shows that when taught properly, age-appropriate sex and relationship education and PSHE work. Research by UNESCO highlights that it can, importantly, delay sexual activity and increase the likelihood of contraceptive use. It is a vital tool in the fight to address unacceptable attitudes to women, combat child abuse and tackle homophobia.

I was describing what happened in 2010, just before the general election. Unfortunately, the Conservative party, faced with all the evidence, decided that it was not willing to support the clauses to introduce PSHE

into the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010, so it was passed without those vital clauses. The argument used with me at that time by Conservative MPs was that the issue was one on which families, not schools, should take the lead. At the time, it often struck me that although of course families play a huge part in equipping young people for growing up and what happens in life, they often do not feel able to talk about such sensitive issues and want professionals to help. I also thought at the time that the children and young people who are most in need of relationship and sex education are, sadly, often from families where there might be domestic abuse or poor communication. They are the very children whom we want to ensure can access good-quality PSHE and SRE.

In the seven years since, more and more MPs from both sides of the House have fought to make the Government see sense. We keep being told that it is being considered—“There's a review. We're having a look at it. We agree things need to be improved”—but there is no action. Over the same period of seven years, the obligations on schools have only become weaker. As more and more schools become academies and more free schools open that do not have to follow the national curriculum, the proportion of schools required to teach SRE has decreased; now only 40% of schools need to do so.

I called this debate because now, more than ever, the Government need to revisit the issue. The Children and Social Work Bill, which is about to enter Report stage in the Commons, now offers them the opportunity finally to amend the law to bring about the changes that should have been incorporated into law in 2010. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us today that the Government will accept the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy).

It is an understatement to say that since 2010, the arguments for improving sex and relationships education have only become stronger. When Labour tried to change the law seven years ago, we already knew that the case for doing so was overwhelming, but none of us predicted the shocking revelations that have emerged since, making the case even more overwhelming.

I am talking about things such as the revelations after the death of Jimmy Savile and Operation Yewtree. We have learned the scale of the exploitation of children and young people that has taken place over many years. Professor Alexis Jay estimates that in Rotherham alone, 1,400 children were abused in the sixteen years to 2013. Her report highlighted that in the minds of many children and young people, SRE in their schools was taught to an extremely poor standard and left them ill-equipped to understand that they were being groomed. We simply do not know the full scale of abuse across the rest of the country. It is thought that at any one time, approximately 5,000 young people are being sexually exploited. Online exploitation is now the fastest growing area of concern.

We also know even more than we did before about the shocking views that many hold about consent in relationships and women in general. A Fawcett Society survey released on 20 January asked:

“If a woman goes out late at night wearing a short skirt, gets drunk and is then the victim of a sexual assault, is she totally or partly to blame?”

Four in 10 men and a similar proportion of women said that she was. On the same day that that survey was released, the world bore witness to the inauguration of President Donald Trump, a man who has boasted of harassing women and who stands accused of abusing numerous female contestants on the American “The Apprentice”.

Half of all female students say that they are sexually harassed every single time they go out to a nightclub, half of all women in the workplace say that they have been harassed and one quarter of the female population has experienced domestic abuse, many on more than one occasion. By the time they start secondary school, the majority of children will already have been exposed to online pornography, often of the most violent nature. Eight in 10 teenagers get most of their teaching on sex and relationships from unreliable sources outside school.

It is no wonder that since Labour first recommended changing the law in 2010, even more organisations have joined the call for a change in the law. The Select Committees on Education and on Women and Equalities have also recommended changes, as has the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. Our education system should be at the forefront of efforts to tackle those problems. I am the first to acknowledge that it is not the whole solution, but it has a big part to play and, sadly, we simply are not doing enough. A vacuum is being left that is being filled with unacceptable messages to our young people.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. One particularly important issue is that having such conversations in school, with age-appropriate information delivered by trusted adults that the children know well, provides a safe space. If any of those young people are experiencing difficulties or challenges, they know that they can speak without fear or embarrassment about anything that might be wrong in their lives. They can have an open and free discussion, which is incredibly important. Does she agree?

**Diana Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes the point well, and I absolutely agree with what she says about safe space.

I am coming to the end of my speech, but I have four asks for the Education Minister. First, will the Government accept new clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill on Report? Does she support making age-appropriate SRE—or, even better, the more encompassing PSHE—a statutory requirement in all academies, free schools, primary schools, and new grammar schools?

Secondly, will any amendment require schools to teach more than just the biology of sex in science lessons? Will schools be required to teach a broader form of SRE that covers consent and relationships? Will she commit to Labour’s original proposals by requiring PSHE to be taught in all schools? Thirdly, will the Government update the 17-year-old guidance on the teaching of SRE to cover same-sex relationships, child abuse, the dangers of online predators and internet pornography, transsexuality and violence against women and girls? Fourthly, what will the Government do to support our professionals to teach the subject in the best possible way? Four in five teachers feel that they

are not sufficiently trained to teach SRE. What measures will the Government take to ensure that our teaching workforce get the training that they need?

In last week’s Adjournment debate, the Minister highlighted that we should take a comprehensive approach to the issue and take the time to review the options to ensure that we get it right. However, I say to her with the greatest of respect that that has already happened. We spent a great deal of time and consulted widely among the relevant people to ensure that our proposals were balanced and effective. I set out clearly in my introduction what steps Labour had put in place under the Children, Schools and Families Bill.

As recent events in the United States show, we cannot assume that the most unacceptable attitudes to women and others will go away on their own. Educationalists, law enforcement experts and campaign groups all agree that the fight must start in our schools. Now, more than ever, we need to improve SRE in our schools. I hope that in the coming debates on the Children and Social Work Bill, the Government will do exactly that, good sense will prevail and young people will finally get the relationship and sex education that they deserve to equip them far better for life than the current outdated provisions.

4.39 pm

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward—for the first time, I think—and to take part in this important debate. I regret that I was unable to speak in the debate a couple of Fridays ago on the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (Statutory Requirement) Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). It is as well to put on record that, contrary to misinformation that circulated on social media, I did not participate in a wilful attempt to filibuster that Bill. In fact, I was a victim of the filibuster, because I did not get a chance to speak on the Bill in the four and a half minutes that were left after the previous debate, which was on the rather obscure issue of homosexual activity in the merchant navy. Anyway, I am here now.

I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), who is always very sincere in her beliefs, but I think she is wrong on this issue. The correct way to introduce these proposals would be via stand-alone, bespoke primary legislation, because this is a very significant issue. I rather regret that she brought up a whole range of other issues, including the proclivities of the newly elected President of the United States. There are major societal issues lying behind some of the very regrettable attitudes to women and girls, but I do not think that we should move outside the bailiwick of what we are here to discuss, which is PSHE in schools. The hon. Lady is asking us to disregard the professional duties and conduct of teachers, governors and headteachers—interestingly, she made no mention of parents.

**Diana Johnson** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Jackson:** Well, very little mention. I stand to be corrected in *Hansard*.

**Diana Johnson:** I want to make it very clear that I mentioned parents quite a lot. I certainly said at the

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outset that the best example that I had seen was a Catholic primary school that had fully consulted with parents and designed PSHE lessons with them.

**Mr Jackson:** I think we are on the same page, then. I ask the hon. Lady to forgive me for what I hope will be my only error in this debate.

Personal, social and health education is already a non-statutory subject on the school curriculum. Government guidance from September 2013 states that it should be taught in all schools as

“an important and necessary part of all pupils’ education... Schools should seek to use PSHE education to build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on...drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education...and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle.”

I agree that so much of what we want to happen should, in theory, already be happening, but I am aware that it is not.

The hon. Lady has put a strong case, but there are questions to ask about her proposal. How does she see the provisions in new clause 1, which has been tabled to the Children and Social Work Bill, sitting with the current legislation on sex and relationships education? We frequently hear calls for compulsory sex education, as if there were not already statutory requirements for schools to teach sex education. However, as I am sure hon. Members are aware, under sections 80 and 101 of the Education Act 2002, maintained schools in England and Wales respectively have a basic curriculum, which for secondary schools includes sex education. Section 403 of the Education Act 1996 sets out the detail of the sex education that governors and headteachers are required to provide and states that they

“must have regard to the Secretary of State’s guidance”

on how it should be taught. Primary schools may teach sex education if the governors think it appropriate.

The Bill that was promoted on 20 January by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion made no specific mention of the existing legislative provisions or of how her proposals would fit in with them. That lack of engagement with the current legislation meant that her Bill would have created significant confusion—and so, I believe, would proposed new clause 1 of the Children and Social Work Bill.

I am aware that there is some concern that sex education is not required in academies in the same way as in maintained schools, since academies are not required to provide a basic curriculum. They are, however, required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum within the requirements of section 78 of the Education Act 2002, to which I referred in my intervention earlier.

For a number of years we were told that SRE was needed to combat teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but it is now argued that SRE is needed to ensure that young people can unravel the messages of pornography. People are rightly concerned that young people are getting the wrong messages on relationships—I agree with what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North said about some of those messages.

**Melanie Onn:** I would argue that what is particularly concerning is not the issue of pornography but the spread of overtly sexualised images that young people are exposed to daily in the form of magazines, newspapers or online adverts that pop up on gaming systems, which young people are incredibly plugged into. That exposure means that young people’s awareness, understanding and maturity are being challenged far more than ever before. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that should also be considered?

**Mr Jackson:** Yes, I do. The hon. Lady makes a very valid point and an astute observation. What we require, however, is a coherent social and moral framework that involves all parties and stakeholders, rather than what appears to be potentially quite a draconian top-down approach that would insert into separate primary legislation a provision seeking change on a long-term endemic societal issue. The objectification of young people, particularly women, and the inappropriate way in which they are treated can lead to grooming, violence against women, trafficking and all the other issues that we know of, but, in fairness, that is some distance from the specific issue of PSHE—although, of course, they are linked.

What can the Government do? We need to look at the level and explicitness of pornography and how to protect children from it, rather than merely treating the symptoms of all the material that is circulating. The Government have taken that duty seriously with the Digital Economy Bill, part 3 of which will soon be implemented. The requirement of robust age verification is not the whole answer, by any means, but it is very important, and I take this opportunity to put on record my great support for the leadership that the Prime Minister and Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have shown on it.

A better way of addressing our concerns would be to ensure that they are properly covered in the new sex education guidance that the Minister will no doubt tell us about later. I would also be interested to hear the views of the Minister and of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North, perhaps in future debates, on how parents fit into the model that the hon. Lady proposes for PSHE. Under the current sex education law, parents can ask for their child to be withdrawn from PSHE lessons, but proposals such as the recent private Member’s Bill do not seem to give them that opportunity.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. Three more Back Benchers wish to speak; I know that the hon. Gentleman is very courteous and will want to give them all a chance to get in. If he stops speaking soon, they will each have five minutes, so I am sure he will want to bring his remarks to a conclusion.

**Mr Jackson:** I am always mindful of your charming and gracious admonitions, Sir Edward, so I will draw my remarks to a close. I would not want to prevent the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) from sharing his views with the world.

I will just conclude by saying that under these proposals—these potentially draconian measures—parents would potentially be less inclined to take responsibility for their children, teachers may be overburdened, and primary schools would be deprived of choice in the

matter, which might be culturally sensitive. Sex education is a sensitive subject that requires close consultation. There is a thinly veiled attempt by some people—not the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North—to impose an ostensibly liberal agenda on the curriculum.

For all those reasons, the Government should listen to key stakeholders—not just to people who have a vested interest, but to constituents, charities, schools, governors, Members of Parliament and councillors. All their responses should be fed into the new guidance. However, we should think very carefully before disregarding the professional skills, knowledge and expertise of people at the lowest level of schools, the importance of a social and moral framework, or the centrality of parents.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** I call Ann Coffey to speak for no more than five minutes, please. Thank you.

4.50 pm

**Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab):** Thank you very much, Sir Edward, for calling me to speak.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this important debate and on her excellent speech calling for statutory sex and relationships education, for which she has campaigned in Parliament with dogged determination for many years.

Across Greater Manchester, there are many excellent projects organised by children and young people to raise awareness in schools and workplaces. They are particularly valuable, as young people listen to each other. There are some great examples of children creating videos and other materials, including a YouTube video about being groomed via text, which was made by Stockport Young Partnership. There has also been a good response to materials such as “Real Love Rocks” by Barnardo’s and GW Theatre Company’s “Somebody’s Sister, Somebody’s Daughter”.

My hon. Friend is also right about the need to inform children starting at primary school. This week, we learned that almost 100,000 eight-year-olds have a mobile phone, and that more than 20,000 were given a handset from the age of six. We need to be concerned about the potential access that allows predators to our children. As Simon Bailey, the National Police Chiefs Council’s lead for child protection, has said, once the police become aware that a child has been abused, “it is too late”. They have already been harmed. Prevention is the key to protecting children.

Talking to children for my 2014 report, “Real Voices: Child Sexual Exploitation in Greater Manchester”, and again this year for some new research, I was struck by how just many children said they thought sex and relationship education must start in primary schools. They felt it was too late to leave it until secondary school to talk about healthy relationships. They also talked about the difficult transition from primary to secondary school and how vulnerable children in particular needed more support. One girl said that teaching about relationships in primary school

“would help people who are younger and naive not to get into dangerous situations”.

She also said:

“In primary schools, they do not teach much about relationships. When you move to secondary school you do not know the rules or

how the other years will act above you and so your actions can be altered because you just want to fit in with what the other kids who are older than you are doing.”

That shows the importance of information being given to primary schoolchildren, because it is important that they start secondary school armed with that knowledge.

We are getting much better at recognising children who are vulnerable to exploitation because of difficult relationships at home. However, what we are not so good at doing is recognising children who do not come from those backgrounds but who for whatever reason are isolated or outside their peer groups at the very time in their development when they are looking for the approval of their peers. Those problems can be exacerbated as a child moves from primary to secondary school.

Some children carry huge burdens of life’s worries. That struck me again when I attended a consultation day on a possible children’s advocacy house in Greater Manchester recently. In one group, children estimated that about 15 out of 40 children in their school class had problems at home or other problems. An indication of the sadness in some of their lives came in the comments they wrote on post-it notes and put on a tree, including: “Hope my sister gets better soon and my mum stops being in pain”; “I wish my Nana would get better”; and “I worry about my mum because she can’t go anywhere but she can go on crutches but she struggles”.

We also need to understand that children who exhibit antisocial and aggressive behaviour often do so because of problems at home. Those children are often supported in primary school, but at the transition to secondary school they find themselves excluded, either for short periods or permanently. That increases their vulnerability, not only to child sexual exploitation but to other forms of exploitation by criminal gangs, such as drug running.

In Stockport last year, the number of children excluded from schools for a fixed period trebled in number from year 6, the last year in primary school, to year 7, the first year in high school. There has also been a rise in peer-on-peer exploitation, fed by websites that promote sex as a violent activity and blur the lines between someone consenting and not consenting.

Although much needed, compulsory sex and relationships education is not enough on its own. We need an environment that encourages children to take responsibility for other children and a culture of respect for each other that informs every day at school. That has been done effectively in some schools to deal with bullying. In Stockport schools, a restorative approach is being developed, through which children help other children to resolve their conflicts and reach resolution. They reach out to children who are not part of a peer group.

Another thing that young people told me again and again was how much they valued talking to their peers. We have many successful peer mentoring programmes in Greater Manchester. One school I visited had a big team of peer mentors, and children had to apply to become a mentor as if they were applying for a job; for example, they needed to have references.

We need to understand that children are a resource in themselves. They understand social media in a way that we cannot. They understand exactly the pressures that they are subject to, and they need to be part of designing projects to inform other young people.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. Could the hon. Lady conclude her remarks?

**Ann Coffey:** We need to give more young people the chance to do that. Thank you, Sir Edward.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Thank you.

4.56 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Thank you, Sir Edward, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on presenting her case, and doing so quite well. I will adopt a similar attitude to my colleague, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson). Education is an essential part of the life of a child. Education must be a priority, but we must acknowledge that in the educational life of a child priority must also be given to things that are not simply academic. A holistic education is important. There must be space for personal development and I am completely supportive of that.

In fairness to the hon. Lady, she set out her case fairly well, but I need to put on the record my concerns and those of many others. Things of a personal nature, such as matters of morality, are better left to parents than to others. That is why I stand today to stress that any change in standards of teaching must contain the ability for parents to withdraw their children from classes. As the father of three boys, I was happy that the school took the role of teaching the mechanics of the “birds and the bees”, but I was also happy—indeed, very happy—that the role of teaching morality and the ramifications of choices was left to us to determine and discuss as a family. It is important to put that on the record.

Currently, primary schools do not have to teach pupils beyond the basic biological aspects of sex education that are required by the national curriculum. Secondary schools are required to teach 14 to 16-year-olds about sexually transmitted diseases, and they should do so. All schools must have an up-to-date policy that describes the content and organisation of sex and relationship education that is taught outside of the science curriculum. This policy must be made available for parents, including information on parents’ rights to withdraw their child from lessons if they feel that is important to them. I think the hon. Lady herself said that; I believe that was what she was saying.

**Diana Johnson** *indicated assent.*

**Jim Shannon:** If that is what the hon. Lady was saying, that is good news—I think we are probably on the same wavelength. To me, this is essential for any family: the right to teach their child the morality and the standards they hope their child will stick to, and the right to withdraw their child from a lesson that they feel will not complement how they teach their child. Again, that is an absolute must for me and the people I represent.

I read a very interesting article by Andrea Williams, chief executive of Christian Concern, which warned that making SRE compulsory would remove the freedom of parents to decide how and when their child is educated on this subject. She wrote:

“For many years, sex and relationship education has not provided a godly stance on sexuality or sexual relationships. Instead, it reflects our society’s increasingly liberal sexual norms.”

It is important that we make the distinction—draw the line—between those two. She continued:

“Making SRE mandatory would limit parents’ freedom to withdraw their children from these lessons if so desired and usurp their responsibility in deciding what they should and should not be taught at what age.”

That is a very important comment from a lady who is greatly respected.

I do not believe that making SRE mandatory can or should happen. As parents, the buck stops with us. We do the best we can with our children and we must be allowed to do so in moral teaching. With the spread of social media, more and more of our young people are taking and sending inappropriate photos, and that can lead to unsafe situations. This is something that parents must take on board and discuss with their children; those who do not wish to do so can allow the school to do so. The choice must be available for parents and I stand firmly by that view.

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op)** *rose—*

**Jim Shannon:** I am happy to give way.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** I am sorry, but Mr Danczuk wants to speak.

**Jim Shannon:** That is okay.

The other thing I wish to mention briefly is the fact that we must also allow teachers who are uncomfortable discussing and promoting British moral values that might undermine their own dearly held personal faith to withdraw from teaching those values, with no penalty and no fear of losing their job. We have many examples of that. There is the example of Ashers in Northern Ireland. We have the case of the bed and breakfast owners and that of the Christian registrar. It is not enough for our Prime Minister to talk about freedom to live one’s faith; we must now have the support of the law to do that. Any legislation must protect the right of teachers to withdraw from promoting values that undermine their faith.

I will leave it at this. I understand that we cannot press our faith on others, but by the same token we should not be expected to directly oppose the teachings of our faith on the say-so of others. Teachers do not want their teaching to promote the latest Government definition of morality; they want it to help a child to have a fully rounded life and to make a difference. Allow them to do that in an appropriate way and legislate to protect them with any proposed changes. We must learn lessons, just as children learn. I, for one, have learned a lot from the Ashers case about the need for protection, and I hope that the Government, and particularly the Minister, can take that on board.

5 pm

**Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate and for all the work she has done on the topic. We have heard some excellent arguments about the need for sex

and relationship education, not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey). I want to focus my remarks on my experience of uncovering allegations of historical child sexual abuse and also of representing Rochdale, a town that has been the victim of child grooming gangs.

Over the past few years we have seen a huge number of survivors of historical child sexual exploitation come forward, and I am sure that they have done this only now in part because of the lack of sex and relationships education back then. A review by the Cochrane Library of school-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse confirms what is obvious, which is that primary-aged children who are taught about the issues are three times more likely to report abuse.

My ex-wife, Karen Danczuk, successfully prosecuted her abuser late last year, after suffering in silence throughout her childhood and adolescence. She is now a patron of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood. She readily admits that she would have been more likely to disclose to the authorities that she was being abused if she had received relationships education. The fact that the abuse she suffered took place at home stresses the importance of that sort of education in schools. Likewise, kids in care and others who lack the typical family support structures may benefit from schools providing information about relationships.

Karen's case also highlights that 11 is too late to start offering relationships advice in schools; her abuse started when she was about six years old. It is therefore imperative that children are made aware of the power within relationships much earlier in their education. I spoke to Karen earlier today, and these are her own words: "The thing to remember with cases like mine is that I didn't know any other life. I didn't know that this shouldn't be happening. There was nobody saying, 'It shouldn't be this way.' If there had been, maybe I would have recognised sooner that what I was going through was wrong." What she is saying is that relationships education could be exceptionally helpful.

We also know, however, that the problem is not just historical cases. There are also the cases in Rochdale and Rotherham, towns that have been blighted through the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children. We need to see sex and relationships education improved right across the board. We should not have a postcode lottery. The status quo puts children who might not attend council-controlled secondary schools at risk. More academies and more free schools means that more and more children might be put at risk, and that is simply not acceptable.

All of that is why I support the attempts of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North to make sex and relationships education a statutory requirement in all state-funded schools.

5.3 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing forward this important, interesting and informative debate.

We all have a role to play in raising awareness of the challenges and potential dangers our young people face and in ensuring that they are equipped to cope. Sex and relationships education plays a vital part in that but so

does society, and debates such as this are really important in bringing the issues to the fore. As a teacher in Scotland I taught—along with physics—what is called personal, social and health education, and it was an element I really enjoyed. Through it, teachers are able to form great relationships with their pupils in ways they cannot always do in a subject class. Relationships, sexual health and parenthood education is an integral part of the health and wellbeing area of the school curriculum in Scotland. Schools equip young people with information on a range of issues, depending on their age and stage. Several Members have highlighted the importance of starting sex education young, and that is right. It is important that our young people are able to identify body parts and use their correct names, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North mentioned, at an early stage. It should not be when we get to teenage giggling that we have to start using the correct names; it has to be normalised very early on.

The curriculum in Scotland includes information on puberty, sexually transmitted infections, contraception, how to access sexual health services and issues such as looking after a baby when you are on your own. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North also highlighted the importance of having parents involved, and a really important aspect of the curriculum in Scotland is that children have to bring the stuff home to get it signed off, so discussion is instigated by schools, forcing parents to be involved. That is such a simple thing to do. Parents are also brought in to schools when a particular element is about to start and those who have concerns, such as those that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) highlighted, are able to discuss them with the school in an open and collaborative way. That is very important. There are schools, such as those that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North mentioned, doing that great work across the UK.

Sticking with parents, the hon. Member for Strangford also mentioned the requirement of allowing parents to withdraw from SRE if they feel that that is appropriate for their children. If parents who are involved and are interested in every aspect of their child's education want to give their particular flavour to something, that is up to them. They can teach the morality beyond the mechanics of sexual reproduction. That is important, but we must remember that many parents do not want to have the discussions with their children and the proposal we are debating attempts to address that.

A number of Members mentioned young people having respect for themselves, which is important, as is the consideration of different types of relationship. I want quickly to mention the Time for Inclusive Education—TIE—campaign and the great work it has done on the understanding that sexuality is not necessarily heterosexual. Great work is being done in schools just now and the Scottish SNP Government have made a commitment in their manifesto to work with the TIE campaign

"to promote an inclusive approach to sex and relationships education".

[*Interruption.*] I understand, Sir Edward. I will just keep going.

I spoke to my son this morning. He is 18 and has just left school, and I asked him whether he had had information about online predators and other online dangers. He said that they had done a lot of work on that, talking about social media—

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Lady has had five minutes and the Chairman of Ways and Means has said that Opposition spokesmen on hour-long debates should speak for only five minutes.

**Carol Monaghan:** Thank you, Sir Edward. I will finish now. There have been many great contributions this afternoon and this is a debate that obviously has a lot of time still to run.

5.9 pm

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important and timely debate. I know that the Government and the Opposition share the common goal of ensuring that our children can approach the world around them with the skills and resilience they need to thrive. Children need to understand what healthy, meaningful friendships look and feel like. They need to know that it is important to respect themselves and others and to be kind and thoughtful about other people's feelings. Our common goal is underpinned by a desire not only to see children thrive, but to see them having the knowledge to contextualise some of the more harmful things they see in the world. They need to know explicitly that men and women are equal, to understand body autonomy and integrity and to know that pinching, groping or any form of sexual harassment is never okay.

Children need to be taught that if someone touches them without their permission, they can and should tell someone, and that no one—child or adult—should ever make them feel scared, frightened or exploited. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) made representations on safe spaces, and I am confident that all Members in the Chamber would agree with her.

The Sex Education Forum survey of 2,000 young people found that more than half of them did not recognise the signs of grooming for sexual exploitation. We heard some powerful testimony from my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) this afternoon, and I applaud all his efforts on sexual exploitation in his constituency and across the country. More than four in 10 of those surveyed had not learned about healthy or abusive relationships. Half of the young people surveyed did not learn how to get help if they had been abused.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North suggested, children have to be taught in an age-appropriate and sensitive way how to build and maintain healthy friendships and relationships. The fact is that the lack of statutory sex and relationships education in primary schools and high schools is leaving our children vulnerable.

The Minister may claim today that many children are receiving good-quality SRE, but I challenge her ability to make that claim. We heard this afternoon that four in five teachers are not adequately trained to provide SRE. SRE is introduced at key stage 3, when a child is 11 years old, and is only statutory in state-maintained schools. At the time of the school census in January 2016, only 35% of high schools were still state-maintained. Furthermore, the only compulsory element of SRE that those schools must teach and a child must be present at is the biology of sex, which is provided as part of the science national curriculum.

The guidance that schools, whether state-maintained or academy, rely on to teach the non-compulsory elements of SRE is 17 years out of date. It was written well before the advent of social media and universal access to the internet. Ofsted has found that SRE required improvement in more than a third of schools, with primary pupils ill-prepared for the physical and emotional changes of puberty. It found that secondary education placed too much emphasis on the mechanics of reproduction. I was struck by the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) about conversations between young people that exposed their level of vulnerability.

A British Humanist Association report looking at how PSHE and SRE are inspected in English schools was published this month. It found that SRE was mentioned by inspectors in less than 1% of the 2,000 Ofsted reports it analysed. Many schools may be providing good-quality SRE, but we need certainty that every school, regardless of their governance and how they are funded, is giving children the knowledge and confidence they need to thrive. I know that the Government recognise those problems. Ministers have been honest with the House that SRE requires considerable improvement, and I welcome their desire to ensure that that is done well, rather than being rushed.

I hope, however, that the Minister will recognise that the Government are running out of time to amend the Children and Social Work Bill. Can she reconfirm, as she said at last Monday's Adjournment debate, that the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families will definitely bring measures on SRE forward as part of the Bill? I want her to know that if those amendments pave the way for good-quality, age-appropriate, statutory SRE, the Opposition will be minded to support those amendments and seek consensus across the House. Can she tell us more about the Government's plans to ensure that all children, not just those who attend a state-maintained high school, have access to high-quality, age-appropriate SRE? I hope she can understand why Members from all parts of the House are so passionate about the issue.

5.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Caroline Dinenage):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your stewardship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate and for her constant and consistent engagement on the important issue of sex and relationships education and personal, social, health and economic education. I also congratulate her constituency and the whole city of Kingston upon Hull on its acclaim as the UK city of culture for 2017.

I very much welcome the opportunity to debate these important issues again. As various Members have mentioned, we spoke about them in last week's Adjournment debate, but it is always valuable to gather and hear more views from more Members from all parts of the House on these areas of concern. I entirely share the hon. Lady's view about the value of children and young people having access to effective, factually accurate and age-appropriate sex and relationships education. I agree with her and the Opposition spokesperson that it has to be about more than that; it has to be about healthy relationships, consent and respect for oneself

and others. Those things are so important if our children are to face the challenges of the modern world. It has been helpful to hear views from Members from all parts of the House, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson), whose birthday it is today.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families has already committed to come back to the House during the consideration of the Children and Social Work Bill with an update on how he intends to proceed. I have to be careful not to steal his thunder, particularly because he is as we speak on paternity leave, which is evidence, if needed, that he was definitely there for that class on which bit went where.

I reassure Members that the Government take the matter seriously. We welcome the extremely helpful input from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North, many other Members and the Women and Equalities Committee, and the ongoing scrutiny of the Bill. The issue is a priority for the Government.

**Mr Jackson:** The paternity leave of my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families will no doubt be interrupted by the Whips tomorrow evening for the vote on article 50. May I press the Minister specifically on the issue of continuing to allow parents to withdraw their children from some classes under any new guidance issued by the Department? Hitherto, that has been a central tenet of Government policy on this sensitive issue.

**Caroline Dinenge:** The input of parents on this subject is fundamentally important, as is the input of teachers and other professionals. The Government are fully committed to exploring all the options to improve the delivery of sex and relationships education and PSHE. We want to ensure the quality of delivery and the accessibility of teaching so that all children can be supported to develop and thrive in modern Britain.

**Dr Poulter:** On that point, I am sure the Minister is aware that many young people find it difficult to talk to their parents about these issues. There is good evidence to suggest that young people sometimes find it difficult to talk to austere parents with a strong religious background about such issues as homosexuality, particularly if they are coming out about their own homosexuality. I hope she will factor those issues in and feed them back to her colleague when he comes back from paternity leave.

**Caroline Dinenge:** That is why it is fundamentally important that we get it right. We have to proceed taking all views into consideration. The existing legislation requires that sex education be compulsory in all maintained secondary schools. Academies and free schools are also required by their funding agreement to teach a “broad and balanced curriculum”, and we encourage them to teach sex and relationships education within that. The Government believe that transparency and consultation between parents, teachers and pupils are vital in the effective delivery of SRE. When developing their SRE policy, all schools should consult pupils’ parents and make the policy available to parents on request and at no charge.

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from any parts of sex and relationships education except the aspects included in the statutory science curriculum

at each of the key stages. Many schools choose to cover issues of consent within SRE, and schools are both able and encouraged to draw on guidance and specialist materials from external expert agencies. For example, Ofsted publishes case studies on its website that efficiently highlight effective practice in schools, including examples of SRE as taught within PSHE. We are actively encouraging schools to use the Ofsted case studies as a resource when they are tailoring their own programmes to meet the specific needs of their pupils. Members have spoken about the support available for teachers, and that is the support. In addition, in 2014 the PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum produced a supplementary guidance document on sex and relationships education for the 21st century, which provides specific advice on what are unfortunately increasingly common risks to children in the modern world, such as online pornography, sexting and staying safe online. That very useful guidance provides teachers with the tools to support pupils on these challenging matters, developing their resilience and their ability to manage risk.

We are actively considering calls to update the guidance on SRE, which was issued back in 2000. Feedback we have received indicates that the guidance is clear, but we understand the argument that it is now 17 years old and needs to be updated, and we are exploring options for doing so. We are fully committed to improving the quality and accessibility of SRE and PSHE. Our intention is to follow a responsible and dynamic approach that engages a wide range of views, including those of parents, teachers and young people. We know that SRE is a developing and vital area of education and we need to do all that we can to ensure that our guidance is fit for purpose and can equip our children with the skills they need to be safe in modern British society.

More broadly, the Government have already shown an understanding of and initiative on the issues that are affecting children and young people today. The advent of social media and other online services has provided great opportunities for young people, but we are very aware that they can also compromise young people’s safety and expose them to a number of risks. The Government expect online industries to ensure that they have appropriate safeguards and processes in place, including access restrictions, for children and young people who use their services.

We have published a guide for parents and carers, which includes practical tips about the use of safety and privacy features on apps and platforms, as well as conversation prompts to help start conversations about online safety. We have also funded the UK Safer Internet Centre to develop new resources for schools, including guidance on understanding, preventing and responding to cyberbullying, and an online safety toolkit, to help schools deliver sessions about cyber-bullying, peer pressure and sexting.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) spoke powerfully about his ex-wife’s experience of abuse in childhood. He might be interested to know that the Government Equalities Office and the Home Office jointly funded a £3.85 million campaign, which was the second phase of the “This is Abuse” campaign, called “Disrespect NoBody”. That ran until May last year and asked young people to rethink their understanding of abuse within relationships. It addressed all forms of relationship abuse, including controlling

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

and coercive behaviour and situations, including in same-sex relationships. Some of it contained gender-neutral messaging; other elements depicted male victims and female perpetrators. It also had an online toolkit that provided advice, guidance and real case studies on issues around pornography, controlling behaviour, consent and rape. It was targeted at 12 to 18-year-old boys and girls, with the aim of preventing them from becoming either perpetrators or victims of abuse.

We welcomed the comprehensive report by the Women and Equalities Committee on sexual health and sexual violence in schools. I was privileged to be able to give evidence to the Committee. The report was published on 13 September last year and contained a number of recommendations, including proposals relating to SRE and PSHE.

I emphasise that we are unanimously in full agreement that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, in any form, is absolutely unacceptable and should not be tolerated. The Government's aim is to ensure that our schools have the tools they need to deliver outstanding sex and relationships education that meets the needs of all pupils in our education system. As I have said, my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families has committed to update Parliament further during the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill. This is an important issue, and we are serious about the need to use any and all effective means to remove sexual harassment and sexual violence from the lives of young people, to equip them with the confidence to know what healthy relationships look like and to

have respect for themselves and others, and to prepare them for the various challenges they might face in modern Britain.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Does the mover of the motion wish to sum up? You can if you wish—there is a bit of time.

5.24 pm

**Diana Johnson:** I am very grateful for all the contributions made today. I understand that this is a very sensitive issue and that people have strong views about the role of parents and what should be taught in schools, and it is a positive move that we are able to have this debate.

However, as I tried to set out in my speech, seven years down the line from when we tried to bring in this measure in 2010, we still seem to be having the same conversations about reviewing things and looking at best practice. For many of us, the time has come—we need to act now for the benefit of children and young people.

I do not think the Minister was able to say directly what is going to happen to the new clause in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), which is to be considered on Report, and whether the Government are minded to accept it. That would be the most sensible course of action.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered statutory sex and relationships education in all Government-funded schools.

5.25 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Tuesday 31 January 2017*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Council

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, alongside my colleagues Fergus Ewing MSP, Lesley Griffiths AM and Michelle McIlveen MLA, on 12 and 13 December in Brussels.

EU quota negotiations, involving decisions on fishing opportunities for the next year for quota stocks in the North sea, Atlantic, channel, Irish and Celtic seas, were first on the agenda, and were ongoing for the entire duration of the Council. This was the third annual Council at which fishing opportunities were set under the rules of the reformed common fisheries policy, which aims to have all stocks fished at sustainable levels by 2020 at the latest.

The UK secured a number of crucial changes to the Commission's original proposals including, where science supports it, quota increases for fishermen around all parts of the UK. This is due to stocks recovering after years of the UK's insistence on limiting catches with sustainable scientific limits. Quotas secured include:

North sea: cod +16.5%, whiting +17%, anglerfish + 20%  
saithe +53% sole +22%

Irish sea: haddock +25% and nephrops +8.6%

Western channel: haddock +7% and sole +20%

North sea hake +12% and western hake +9%

The quota settlement for 2017 is worth just over £705 million to the UK, around £34 million more than in 2016.

The agreement means that for 2017, 29 stocks of interest to the UK will be fished at or below their maximum sustainable yield rate (MSY), an increase on 2016, out of 45 such stocks for which MSY assessments have been made. At the EU level, 44 stocks are fished at or below MSY, as announced by Commissioner Vella at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/agrifish-council\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/agrifish-council_en).

Where the latest scientific evidence supported it, the UK Government argued against unnecessary quota cuts proposed by the European Commission, securing the same quota as in 2016 for many species, including cod and sole in the Irish sea, anglerfish in the Celtic sea and whiting in west of Scotland.

There were some challenges especially on stocks like bass, cod, and megrim in the south west and sole in the eastern channel, where action is necessary to cut fishing mortality in order to allow these stocks to recover. However, we worked hard to secure an agreement that strikes the right balance for both our marine environment and coastal communities.

For 2017, sea bass catch limits from vessels using fixed gill nets were set at 250kg per month for unavoidable by-catch—a reduction of around 80% from 2016—while

hook and line commercial fishermen saw their potential catch cut by around 23%. The restrictions on recreational angling will remain the same as in 2016.

Proportionate quota uplifts were agreed for demersal stocks subject to the landing obligation in 2017. As in 2016, the Government will continue to support the English inshore fleet to adapt to the landing obligation, by allocating to them the first 100 tonnes of quota uplift of a species and 10% thereafter. There will be additional quota uplift in 2017 for new species such as North sea cod and north western waters pollack.

A paper was presented on climate change effort share regulation and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), discussed alongside the “any other business” item on agroecology. Many member states, including the United Kingdom, were broadly satisfied with the proposals outlined in the paper. The UK intervened to argue that a methodology should be found to ensure a fairer distribution of credits between member states.

After this, the Council agreed conclusions on tackling unfair trading practices in the farming supply chain. The UK managed to secure a wording change that lessens the chance in 2017 of burdensome EU legislation that could hinder our current work in this area, as undertaken by the groceries code adjudicator.

There then followed a political discussion on new regulation for organic produce, which will continue into the upcoming Maltese presidency.

Several other items were discussed under “any other business”:

Austria lodged a request to maintain the current level of support for first generation biofuels, supported by other member states. While noting this remains the responsibility of Commissioner Canete, Commissioner Hogan informed Council that the reduction of support was very modest, pertaining to a very small part of the biofuel sector.

France debriefed the Council on a conference of Mediterranean countries that took place in Tirana, Albania, where agricultural and rural development and migrations in the Mediterranean zone was discussed.

Commissioner Andriukaitis informed the Council about the first meeting of the food waste platform.

Commissioner Andriukaitis also updated Ministers on the work of the expert group on accelerating sustainable plant protection products. The advisory group recommended speeding up approvals of low-risk active substances, measures to stimulate businesses to apply for authorisations and the identification of low-risk products already on the market.

Commissioner Andriukaitis announced that the new regulation on plant pests was now in force. The Commission sees this new legislation as allowing a much more proactive approach to the prevention of the entry of new pests into the EU. Malta, as incoming presidency, mentioned plans to establish fora to take forward further discussion on identifying further action.

The Slovak presidency explained that the Commission had issued a guidance note expressing a preference for the use of the plant breeders' rights framework, rather than the patent legislation to register new strains. This was welcomed by a range of other member states.

On 23 June, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. Leaving

the EU will present us with opportunities to better manage fisheries in our waters and become global champions for sustainable fishing, while protecting the marine environment.

[HCWS444]

## JUSTICE

### Courts and Tribunals

#### **The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald):**

The Government are committed to making sure people from all backgrounds can access justice.

Since fees were introduced, record numbers of working people have sought to resolve employment disputes either through tribunals or conciliation.

In 2015-16 there were more than 92,000 workplace disputes brought forward for resolution—the highest number since ET fees were introduced.

We believe we can improve on this, so today I am launching a consultation on proposals to extend support available to people on low incomes through the Help with Fees scheme.

Under our proposals, the monthly threshold for a full fee remission would be increased from £1,085 to £1,250—broadly the equivalent of someone earning the national living wage. There are additional allowances for people living as couples and those with children.

We will bring forward further measures to improve legal support in a Green Paper by early 2018 and the Prison and Courts Bill, due to be published shortly, which will enable more people to bring cases online, making it simpler and easier to access justice.

Under the extension to Help with Fees scheme, more people would not pay a fee at tribunal and others would contribute less than under current arrangements.

In particular the extended scheme would benefit women, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people and younger people, who all feature disproportionately among low income groups.

These proposals would apply not only to people bringing ET proceedings, but also to those bringing proceedings in the civil and family courts and most other tribunals.

We have also decided to exempt from fees a small number of proceedings related to payments made from the national insurance fund. Unlike most proceedings before the ETs, in most cases the applicant is unable to conciliate, and they are unlikely to be able to recover the fee from an employer which in many cases will be insolvent.

We have decided to take this action following the findings of the post implementation review of the introduction of fees in the employment tribunals (ETs), which I am also publishing today.

The review has undertaken a very detailed and thorough analysis of the evidence, and we have concluded that fees have been generally successful in meeting the original objectives.

The Government believe it is important that those who can afford to pay for ETs continue to do so. An extra £9 million a year is raised through ET fees.

The review concludes that fees have been successful in promoting conciliation as an alternative way to resolve workplace disputes.

The review states that

“there is no conclusive evidence that ET fees have prevented people from bringing claims”

and that higher numbers turning to ACAS is a “positive outcome”.

This indicates the current system is generally working effectively and is operating lawfully.

This does not mean there is no room for improvement and where we have identified issues, we have not been afraid to address them.

In particular there is evidence that some people have found the fees off-putting—even if they were affordable or they may have qualified for fees to be waived.

This has been addressed with a campaign to raise awareness of the scheme and a new online application form to make it easier for people to apply.

[HCWS445]

# Petition

*Tuesday 31 January 2017*

## OBSERVATIONS

### HEALTH

#### **Future of King Street Health Centre, Wakefield**

*The petition of residents of Wakefield,*

Declares that King Street Health Centre is a vital service for Wakefield, and helps to ease the pressures on local GP surgeries, pharmacies, and Pinderfields Hospital; further that Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group is reviewing the future of the GP-led services at King Street Health Centre, as the contract is up for renewal in March 2017; further that the petitioners are concerned that closure or removal of services from King Street Health Centre would put at risk the future of the King Street Walk-in Service, which shares the same facilities, staff and building; and further that 1955 persons have signed an online petition in similar terms.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government and Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group to take all necessary steps to ensure that King Street Health Centre remains open and has the current contract for GP-led services extended to allow Wakefield residents continued access to health care.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Creagh, *Official Report*, 11 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 428.]

[P002001]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):*

Configuration of health services is a matter for the local NHS. Any changes must meet the four tests for service change: they must have support from GP commissioners, be based on clinical evidence, demonstrate public and patient engagement, and consider patient choice.

Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) advises that no decision has been taken on the future of the GP surgery based at King Street Health Centre. The contract with the current service provider (Local Care Direct) expires in March 2017. The CCG advises it therefore conducted 12 weeks of engagement with the local community and other stakeholders.

The engagement asked patients to consider what aspects of care patients value, their views on the care they receive, any worries they might have about a potential change and what support, if any, they would require should there be a change. These questions covered aspects of the three options currently being considered. The CCG advises that in total 223 surveys were completed via various sources and that the results are currently being analysed by an independent company. The final consolidated report and request for decision on the future of services will be presented to the Probity Committee on 31 January 2017.

The CCG advises that the walk-in service at King Street Health Centre is provided under a separate contract which has been extended until October 2017. Any proposal to change this service would be the subject of a separate public engagement exercise.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 31 January 2017

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# PETITION

Tuesday 31 January 2017

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**not later than  
Tuesday 7 February 2017**

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