

**Thursday  
9 February 2017**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 9 February 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 9 February 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Channel 4

1. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): When she plans to announce the future status of Channel 4. [908716]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** In a fast-changing and challenging broadcasting environment, the Government want to ensure that Channel 4 has a strong and secure future, and that it can continue to provide for audiences and support the creative industries across the UK. The Government are looking at a broad range of options, and we will set out our plans in that area in due course.

**Christian Matheson:** It is a shame that the review is not as fast-changing and fast-moving as the broadcasting environment. At the end of this month, the review will have taken longer than the BBC charter review, so can we now put the review out of its misery, and declare that Channel 4 works well and will not be privatised?

**Karen Bradley:** Unlike the BBC charter review, this is not a formal process and there is no end date at which the charter expires, as there is with the BBC, but we do need to make sure that we get this right. I want to see Channel 4 survive, flourish and prosper in what is an ever-changing broadcasting world, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, and that means that we are working with Channel 4 to get the right deal for viewers and the whole country.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): What does my right hon. Friend think the view of the Competition and Markets Authority would be if a company that already owned one broadcaster the size of the BBC wanted to own another the size of Channel 4? If she agrees that that simply would not be allowed, will she please immediately begin the process to sell off Channel 4?

**Karen Bradley:** I know that my hon. Friend has strong views on this subject. I assure him that we are looking at all options, and we will report to the House in due course.

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said, the question of whether Channel 4 will or will not be privatised is one of the longest running soaps in this House. Can the Secretary of State confirm that there will not be a shareholder solution, that it will not be privatised and that it will not be for profit—that it will be not for profit? I expect that she is coming under pressure from Government Back Benchers to privatise Channel 4.

**Karen Bradley:** I know that the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) is particularly interested in long-running soaps on Channel 4, given that “Hollyoaks” is set in his constituency. I want to make sure that “Hollyoaks” and other programmes set across the UK are able to prosper so that we have a plurality of broadcasting that works for everyone.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that Channel 4 recently won broadcaster of the year at the Broadcast Awards. Does she therefore agree that if it ain't broke, don't fix it?

**Karen Bradley:** The important point is that we make sure that Channel 4 has a long-term, sustainable future. That is why we are looking at all options so that we can ensure that a station that relies very predominantly on advertising revenue is able to continue, and to provide the excellent broadcasting for which Channel 4 is renowned.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): When the Secretary of State spoke to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee last year, she said that she would come to a decision in the “nearish future.” Now she says that she will come to a decision “in due course.” I do not know whether the nearish future is sooner than in due course, but this faffing around on Channel 4 has to stop. She has to show some leadership because the uncertainty is damaging its business and our broadcasting industry. Rather than taking a decision in the nearish future, will she now commit to doing so immediately?

**Karen Bradley:** I do not agree that this is affecting the quality of broadcasting that Channel 4 is able to produce. The fact that Channel 4 has committed, for example, to broadcasting the para-athletics, which is being held in London next summer, is a very positive move that we all welcome. I want to get this right, and I am working with Channel 4 and all stakeholders. I want to make sure that Channel 4 has a long-term, sustainable future, and I will report back to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

### Brass Bands

2. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote brass bands. [908717]

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):** We strongly support brass bands through regular Arts Council funding to organisations such as Brass Bands England. Additionally, large brass bands can take advantage of the orchestra tax relief, which was introduced in April 2016.

**Mr Hollobone:** Youth Brass 2000 is a young people's brass band based in the village of Wilbarston in the Kettering constituency. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating it on recently being crowned British open youth brass band champion for the fifth year running? Is it not an excellent example that other youth bands should be pleased to follow?

**Matt Hancock:** I am delighted to trumpet the success of the British open youth champions, who have won for the fifth year in a row. I played the cornet in a brass band when I was a boy, but I never rose to the dizzying heights of the national champions whom my hon. Friend represents. I send congratulations to them all.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** In my constituency of Strangford, we have the wonderful Newtownards silver band, which brings together the young and the not so young playing instruments that are also young and not so young. I understand that the Minister is keen to support that, so will he endorse the need for cross-community participation and gender balance to ensure that the brass bands of the future can succeed?

**Matt Hancock:** As we can see by the response in the House, there are brass bands right across the country—the Haverhill band in my constituency is a particularly good example. The hon. Gentleman's point that brass bands, like other music organisations, can bring together people from different backgrounds across cultural divides and provide a point of unity is well made.

**Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con):** The Minister is certainly not known for blowing his own trumpet. I am sure that, like me, he would like to congratulate the Haslingden and Helmsshore band, the Water band, the 2nd Rossendale Scout band, the Whitworth Vale and Healey band and the Darwen brass band, all of which work with young people in particular. Will he take this opportunity to thank all those bands for the fantastic work that they do to get young people off the street, give them a love of music and get them performing?

**Matt Hancock:** I never got to the point of playing the trumpet—I was a mere cornet player—but I do want to bang the drum for all the brass bands that my hon. Friend mentioned.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** The long-term sustainability of our brass bands, including the fine Blaenavon town band in my home town, depends on affordable music lessons being available in schools. Does the Minister agree that the Government's cuts to the devolved Administrations' local councils have put that at risk?

**Matt Hancock:** People who play in brass bands right across the country should be enthused by the support for this question from both sides of the Chamber. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. In England, where the UK Government are responsible for support, we have put £300 million into music hubs to ensure that everybody gets the opportunity to play a musical instrument. It is up to devolved authorities to do that outside England, and I wish that the Welsh Government would do something similar.

## Leaving the EU: Creative Industries

3. **George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP):** What assessment she has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the creative industries. [908718]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** The Government want to ensure the best deal for Britain on leaving the European Union and to provide as much certainty as we can. The creative industries are one of the UK's greatest success stories, contributing more than £87 billion to the economy and more than £19 billion in exports. I am confident that that will continue when we leave the European Union, and we have been working with the industry to ensure that that is the case.

**George Kerevan:** I am sure the Secretary of State has her favourite rock band, so could she assure us that the Government are taking steps to ensure that increased carnet costs and work visa requirements do not kill off UK musicians' ability to tour European venues post-Brexit?

**Karen Bradley:** It has been pointed out by hon. Friends behind me that we have moved from brass bands to rock bands—that was a nice segue by the hon. Gentleman. The point is that the UK music industry is a global leader—it is a leader not just in 27 European Union countries, but around the world. It is British bands that are touring around the world. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I am working closely with the industry to ensure that we get the very best deal for British music not only in Europe, but around the world.

13. [908728] **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** The EU is a source of crucial funding for the creative sector—Scottish organisations have received more than £12 million from Creative Europe since 2014—but there has been absolutely no word from the Government about what will happen to that source of funding after the UK leaves the EU. Will the Secretary of State give a clear commitment that creative industries will not be worse off as a result of the UK leaving?

**Karen Bradley:** My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has committed to securing funding until 2020, which is after the UK will leave the European Union. I am working closely with the industry and across Government to make sure that we get the right deal for Britain so that we have the support needed to ensure that our creative industries flourish.

**Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab):** When I look at the stylish men and women on the Government Front Bench, I think that each and every one of them—except, perhaps, the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson)—could be models on the catwalk at London fashion week. The fashion industry is concerned that, as the UK leaves the EU, we will lose the right to protect original designs, which would have serious knock-on effects for trade showcases, including fashion week. Will the Secretary of State tell us what the Government are doing to make sure that our designers' intellectual property rights are protected post-Brexit?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Gentleman asks a very timely question not only because fashion week is coming up, but because the Minister of State and I met the fashion industry only on Monday to discuss exactly those points. I reassure him and the fashion industry that, because the great repeal Bill will bring European rules into UK law, therefore making sure that there is no cliff edge, those rights will be protected.

**John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Last week, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee took evidence from John Kampfner and others representing the creative industries. Some of those industries employ a 40% EU workforce, and these people are now in limbo. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give that their roles and livelihoods are secure?

**Karen Bradley:** I pay tribute to the work of the Creative Industries Federation, led by John Kampfner, and the role that it has played in working with the Government to develop our plan to ensure that we get the right deal for the creative industries when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. The hon. Gentleman will also know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been very clear that she wants an early settlement on the matter of EU nationals in the UK, and UK nationals living in Europe. She is working hard, as we all are across Government, to ensure that we can achieve that as soon as possible.

#### Sports Stadiums: Accessibility

4. **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What recent progress the Government have made on making sports stadiums accessible for disabled people. [908719]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** We expect all sports and all clubs to take the necessary action to fulfil their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 so that disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage when accessing sports venues. Football has the highest profile on this issue and is stepping up to fulfil those obligations, and we expect all other sports to do the same.

**Dr Cameron:** As chair of the all-party group on disability, people from across the United Kingdom have been contacting me with grave concerns about the lack of accessibility to sports stadiums. Will the Minister meet me and the all-party group to discuss this extremely important matter and the steps that can move us forwards?

**Tracey Crouch:** May I start by congratulating the hon. Lady on all that she does in championing disability rights? Her reputation on this matter is fast spreading around the Chamber and beyond.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work and I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady to discuss this issue, which we care passionately about and are making progress on. It is not just the English premier league that we are talking about, but football throughout this country and across the other home nations. I urge all Members to do what they can to encourage their local clubs to be as successful as possible.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Given all the wealth in premier league football, does the Minister agree that it is unacceptable that there are still clubs that do not yet have a plan to meet accessibility targets for their stadiums? Does she also agree with the Select Committee's report that clubs that fail to do that should face legal action?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not agree that the clubs do not have a plan; they have a plan, but they might not be meeting it. My hon. Friend is right that there should be legal action, but it is not for me to advance that. He will be aware that the Equality and Human Rights Commission is the body that enforces the Equality Act 2010. If insufficient progress is being made by clubs, the commission should consider using its legal powers—it would have my full support were it to do so.

7. [908722] **Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): The Government continue to be complacent on this issue, as the Minister's reply shows. Their approach seems to be to leave it up to individuals—those who have been discriminated against—to enforce the target, yet when they try to enforce it, the Government hit them with huge tribunal fees. Will the Government get their act together and enforce the legislation? Will they do it themselves and stop passing the buck?

**Tracey Crouch:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman listened to my answer. The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the enforcement body. If it decided to take legal action, it would have Government support. I know that he is a fan of Wolverhampton Wanderers, and that Molineux is still 62 spaces short of its own target. I hope that he will do all he can to continue to encourage the excellent disabled fans group to make sure that the club meets its target.

#### S4C

5. **Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): What plans she has for the future funding of S4C; and if she will make a statement. [908720]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have committed to a comprehensive review of S4C this year. It will look at a range of issues, including funding arrangements, remit, accountability and governance. I look forward to his contributions to that review.

**Mr Williams:** I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. She will be aware of the huge significance of S4C to the people of Wales. When the announcement of a review was made last year, the Government wisely froze the cut to the Department's share of S4C's budget. The review has not yet started—it will conclude this year—so will she guarantee again to freeze any proposed cut to S4C's budget?

**Karen Bradley:** The Government are committed to ensuring that S4C has a strong and sustainable long-term future in broadcasting. We will ensure that the appropriate budgets are available.

14. [908729] **Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The forthcoming independent review of S4C is welcome, although it remains something of a Scarlet Pimpernel. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the review's remit will include the capacity to specify



recommendations about present and future funding arrangements to ensure that the channel can achieve its public service obligations?

**Karen Bradley:** We have ensured that S4C has appropriate funding for a very long time. It was a Conservative Government who introduced S4C in the first place. The Government gave more than £6 million this year and we will be giving more than £6 million next year. That funding is in addition to the money that comes from the licence fee. I hope that that reassures the hon. Lady that we are committed to S4C.

**Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** The current projection for S4C still means a 10% cut in its funding between now and 2021. Will the Secretary of State assure me that the review will strongly look at ensuring that there is a definitive base for S4C's funding?

**Karen Bradley:** We are putting together the terms of reference for the review. I look forward to the right hon. Gentleman's comments when the review is put forward.

### Superfast Broadband: Universal Coverage

6. **Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** What assessment the Government have made of the potential merits of providing universal superfast broadband coverage. [908721]

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):** We strongly support the roll-out of superfast broadband, which is on track to be available to 95% of premises by the end of the year.

**Stephen Kinnock:** Almost one in three homes in my Aberavon constituency have broadband speeds of below 10 megabits a second. Moreover, I recently conducted a survey of my constituents in which 44% of respondents reported repeated loss of broadband service. Does the Minister agree that the future growth prospects of Aberavon will be severely constrained if this situation continues?

**Matt Hancock:** I will look into the figures that the hon. Gentleman mentions. Thinkbroadband, the independent body that publishes figures on this, thinks that the number of properties in Aberavon to which superfast broadband is available is much higher and, indeed, ahead of the national average. There has been a huge effort to roll out superfast broadband but, of course, there is a difference between something being available and it being taken up. It is important to ensure that people take up broadband when it is available.

**Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con):** The hardest-to-reach rural and isolated areas across the country have still not been reached by broadband. I urge the Government to have a flexible approach—perhaps using a voucher system in some cases—and to use all technologies to get broadband out to those isolated areas.

**Matt Hancock:** I very strongly agree with my hon. Friend.

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab):** When they were designing the superfast broadband tender, the Government were warned that they were

effectively entrenching BT's monopoly. In designing the universal service obligation, they now appear to be making exactly the same mistake again. Will the Minister commit to delivering choice in our broadband networks?

**Matt Hancock:** The premise of the hon. Lady's question is wrong. Many companies are now delivering into the Broadband Delivery UK scheme. In fact, companies that did not even exist a few years ago are now delivering superfast broadband—and much faster—right across the country.

### Library Services

8. **Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** What steps she is taking to improve access to library services in (a) Staffordshire and (b) England; and if she will make a statement. [908723]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson):** The Government are providing support for library authorities throughout England to deliver library services that are accessible and modern, and that meet local needs. That includes a £4 million libraries innovation fund, new wi-fi provision and support for library authorities to explore alternative operating models such as mutuals. I strongly believe that staff should have a stake in the public services they provide.

**Michael Fabricant:** Lichfield library is situated in a lovely old building, but it would cost more than £1 million to maintain it, so Staffordshire County Council decided to move the library into a heritage centre, which will strengthen that centre, and the old library building is now being privatised and restored. It is a win-win situation. What sort of advice on best practice does the Department give to other county councils? Perhaps Staffordshire County Council could be a model, in this instance at least.

**Mr Wilson:** I welcome the approach that has been taken by Lichfield library and congratulate Staffordshire County Council on its work. Local authorities need to think imaginatively about how libraries can deliver their priorities, and the ambition document that we recently published through the Libraries Taskforce challenges them to do so. Standing still is really not an option. I encourage local authorities to embrace change and to be bold in finding solutions, as Staffordshire has done.

**Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con):** May I thank the Minister for being so personally engaged in supporting our efforts to protect Swindon's vital community libraries? Will he join me in praising Councillor Dale Heenan for setting up the community library trust that has saved Covingham library and that should be expanded further?

**Mr Wilson:** May I thank my hon. Friend for all the efforts he is making in Swindon? I recently visited the local authority, and I was really encouraged by the desire to keep local libraries open. I join him in congratulating his local colleague and local councillor on the work he has done in setting up a local trust and keeping libraries open.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908699] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley):** Today, my Department published the first annual report setting out our progress against “Sporting Future”, our sport strategy for an active nation. Since the last oral questions, my ministerial team and I have held a series of roundtable meetings with representatives from various DCMS sectors. The purpose of these meetings is to identify challenges and opportunities as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** Last week, when I visited Deptford Green secondary school, a teenager from the school council asked me a question, and she started by saying, “It’s not political.” She asked me, “Why are there not more sports facilities for young girls in the area?” Female sports participation is half men’s—this was a very political question from a young girl—and is that any surprise when female role models such as Steph Houghton, England’s women’s football captain, is paid £65,000 a year, while Wayne Rooney is paid £250,000 a week? That is £12 million—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry—it is a very good question, but it is far too long. Topical questions have got to be much shorter. I am sorry to interrupt, but I think we have got the gist.

**Karen Bradley:** I very much got the gist of the question, Mr Speaker. I do appreciate the point. We are well aware of it, and we are working across the Government to address it.

T2. [908700] **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Will the Minister tell the House what work her Department is doing to help small charities to secure public service contracts?

**Karen Bradley:** My right hon. Friend raises a very important point. We all know that the voluntary sector has the ability to bring greater social value to our public services, but we also know that it can sometimes face barriers when up against more established providers. That is why we announced a new programme of measures in this area in December and why an implementation group chaired by Sir Martyn Lewis and attended by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), the Minister for Civil Society, met for the first time yesterday to lead our work on this issue.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Keeping our children safe online is one of the Government’s most important responsibilities. That is why section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 rightly made it a criminal offence for adults to send sexual messages to children, yet the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children says that, two years on, the law is still not enforced and the police cannot enforce it. Will the Minister explain to the House why the Government are dragging their feet on this and ensure that this legislation is implemented immediately?

### The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):

It is very good to see a member of the shadow team who has been voting with the rest of the shadow Front Bench this week.

On the important issue that she addresses, ensuring internet safety is, as she knows, at the top of the Government’s agenda. It has been a crucial part of the Digital Economy Bill, and the proposal she makes is also something we are considering very seriously.

T3. [908701] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Malton is widely recognised as the horse-racing capital of the north. The many racing stables and the hundreds of staff there very much welcome the introduction of the new horserace betting levy, which will bring up to £30 million a year into the industry. Will the Minister update us on the progress on its implementation?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** I recognise the valuable contribution that horse-racing makes to the north and, indeed, to the whole country. We remain on course to implement the reforms to the levy in April 2017, and we will lay legislation to that effect shortly.

T6. [908704] **Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Every gay player, coach and volunteer in every sport should be made welcome. Will the Minister join me in praising the leadership shown by rugby league in tackling homophobia in sport, on this the day that the Super League season kicks off?

**Tracey Crouch:** I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in praising rugby league for all its efforts to make progress on this issue. Homophobia should not be allowed in sport. We share the same rugby league team, Leeds, and we wish them well this evening against St Helens.

T4. [908702] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): English and Welsh wine is a great British quality success story and will be producing more than 12 million bottles by 2020. I know that the Secretary of State personally does her bit to boost wine consumption, but what is she doing to promote the use of English wine as standard in her Department and across Departments, and its tourist value in attracting visitors to our emerging wine regions?

**Tracey Crouch:** I have in my constituency Chapel Down, one of the finest English wines that we sell in this country. I am certainly very passionate about English wine, for all the right reasons, and we must ensure that it is a key part of the tourism offer.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Manchester United should be applauded for its recent announcement on increasing the number of disabled supporters attending games by 300, but this is not a step that clubs at all levels can afford to take. What will the Minister do to support the smaller clubs that are looking to improve the experience of disabled supporters attending their matches?

**Tracey Crouch:** Manchester United should be applauded for this. A number of other premier league clubs are improving their offer for disabled spectators, but it is true that clubs in lower leagues find it difficult. They are

working well with Level Playing Field to ensure that they meet their commitment going forward, and we as a Government do all we can to support that.

T5. [908703] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): If a broadband service is advertised as fibre, should it not be full fibre, and should not the service speed advertised be accessible by at least half of all those paying for it?

**Matt Hancock:** I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an important point. The Advertising Standards Authority, a non-statutory body, is looking into some of these issues, but it needs to look more broadly to make sure that people know what they are getting and advertising is proper and fair.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): In 2014-15, nearly £4 million was lost in fixed odds betting terminals in my constituency by those who can least afford it. I know that the Minister is aware of the concerns again highlighted last week in a report by the all-party parliamentary group on fixed odds betting terminals. May I urge her to respond positively? Let us have lower stakes for these machines.

**Tracey Crouch:** The Government announced a review of gaming machines, including FOBTs, on 24 October 2016. I am currently considering its findings and will publish my recommendations shortly.

T7. [908705] **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Melksham Town football club in my constituency is part of the very fabric of the Melksham community. It has inspired generation after generation to participate in sports and stay healthy, and fostered a sense of town pride. Will the Minister therefore join me in welcoming the opening of Oakfields, the home of Melksham's football and rugby teams, thanks to a £7 million investment?

**Tracey Crouch:** I am very pleased to hear that Oakfields has now opened. Having the right facilities in the right places and combining sports within them is not only important in driving up participation but excellent value for money.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The tech sector's No. 1 Brexit concern is that, when we leave, it will become unlawful to send personal data from Europe to UK firms unless the European Commission has declared our data protection arrangements to be adequate. What steps are being taken to secure that declaration in time?

**Matt Hancock:** This is a very important point. It is vital to make sure that we have an unhindered flow of data between the UK and the EU, and indeed other trading partners around the world such as the US. We are implementing the general data protection regulation in full, to make sure that we can have that unhindered flow of data.

T8. [908706] **Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): In 2020, as my right hon. Friend knows, Plymouth will be celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower setting sail to found the American

colonies. What discussions has she had with the Secretary of State for Transport to make sure that tourists can get to Plymouth to celebrate this wonderful event?

**Karen Bradley:** Last week, I had the honour of meeting the team who are putting together the Mayflower 400 celebrations. I also attended an event at the US embassy last summer where I saw a replica of the Mayflower that is going to be part of the celebrations that we look forward to in 2020. It is important that as many people as possible can visit those celebrations. I had discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport on this matter only last night.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): When the Government reduced the maximum stake on fixed odds betting terminals to £50, they accepted the principle that lowering the stake would have a positive impact on problem gambling. As part of the review, will you examine the success of that measure and, if it has been successful in dealing with that problem, will you consider reducing the stake even further?

**Mr Speaker:** I will do neither of those things, but the Minister might do one or the other or, conceivably, if the hon. Gentleman is a lucky boy, both.

**Tracey Crouch:** We have had plenty of responses to the consultation, and you will be very welcome to help to consider them, Mr Speaker. I will be making my recommendations shortly. We are looking through the body of evidence that came to us as a consequence of the review that was published in October. I expect to publish the recommendations and the findings of the call for evidence in the spring.

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

1. **Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on UK environmental legislation of investment protection provisions in the EU-Canada comprehensive economic and trade agreement. [908684]

**The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands):** The EU-Canada comprehensive economic and trade agreement—CETA—is a good agreement for the UK. It will promote jobs and growth and benefit consumers. The UK Government are fully committed to supporting such agreements while we remain an EU member. The investment protection provisions in CETA will have no impact on UK environmental legislation. They cannot force the UK or other parties to change their laws on the environment or any on other area of public policy.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I am grateful for that answer, but many of my constituents are worried about us maintaining our current environmental standards post-Brexit. Can the Minister guarantee that with this trade deal and, indeed, any other trade deal that the UK intends to make, our current environmental standards will not be watered down?



**Greg Hands:** Enshrined in CETA and many other free trade agreements is the UK's right to regulate in these areas, and that includes key environmental protections. There is nothing, for example, in the investment court system that would force the UK to change its environmental regulations. I notice, however, that the hon. Gentleman voted against CETA yesterday, in line with the Leader of the Opposition, but he may not know that when CETA was debated in Committee on Monday, the Official Opposition were actually in favour of it.

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** Has my right hon. Friend heard of CANZUK, and is he encouraged by it? This is the plan being proposed in the Canadian Parliament for a Canada, Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom trade partnership after Brexit. Does he share my enthusiasm for it?

**Greg Hands:** I have seen this proposal, and we are very enthusiastic about the future of UK trade with Canada. I repeat that we are currently very supportive of CETA going through. We think it is very important for the UK, for the European Union and for Canada, and we will continue to campaign for it to go through, not least in the face of the new-found opposition by Her Majesty's Opposition.

**Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab):** May I point out to the Minister that in the deferred Division, a majority of Labour Members voted for the trade deal? Given that Canada is such a long-standing Commonwealth friend, ally and defence and trade partner, could he answer this basic question: in a post-Brexit world, if we cannot do a deal with Canada, who the hell can we do a deal with?

**Greg Hands:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman very much indeed for that question. He is right that more Labour MPs—86—voted for CETA than the 68 who voted against it, with perhaps more than 100 abstaining. This agreement has been eight years in gestation. You would have thought, Mr Speaker, that the Opposition would have got their act together by now. On the point that the right hon. Gentleman made, I quote from one of his colleagues, who said:

“If we don't support a trade deal with liberal, Justin Trudeau-led Canada, who do we support trade deals with?”

**Mr Spellar:** That was actually me.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Post-Brexit, will CETA be transitioned into a bilateral arrangement, or will there need to be a fresh Canada-UK agreement?

**Greg Hands:** My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, and I think we will have to look at that when we come to it. There are a number of important aspects of CETA that we might look to replicate in a future deal, but, for the time being, while we remain a member of the EU, the UK remains strongly supportive of CETA going through.

I heard the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) say that he was the unnamed Back Bencher referred to in the “Politics Home” article. It is good to see that he is now named, and that he is supporting the Labour party's traditional friends in Canada, the Liberal party.

## Fair Trade

**2. Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP):** What recent progress the Government have made on promoting fair trade with developing countries. [908685]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** The Government will lead the way in ensuring that developing countries have the opportunity to trade their way out of poverty. While the UK is a member of the European Union, we remain committed to development through the EU, including economic partnership agreements, the generalised scheme of preferences and “Everything But Arms”. We are working closely with the Department for International Development to ensure that the global trading system of the future is as fair and as free as possible.

**Dr Cameron:** Trade with developing countries is crucial to ensuring jobs and livelihoods, and our commitment to the sustainable development goals. Will the Secretary of State commit to fair trade principles in relation to future trade deals with developing countries to ensure that local populations can benefit sustainably and to complement the work of the DFID staff in my constituency and beyond?

**Dr Fox:** Let me join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the fair trade campaign. It is very important in ensuring that farmers receive a fair price for their products, that agricultural workers receive better wages and that agricultural practices are made more sustainable. As Britain leaves the European Union, we will actually have greater freedom outside the common external tariff to be able to do some of the things she recommends.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** Whether we look at west African cocoa, east African coffee or Tunisian olives, time and again we find that the cause of unfair trade policy is the European Union. Does the Secretary of State agree with me that once we can set our own tariffs outside the common external tariff of the EU, we will be able to help those countries to trade their way out of poverty?

**Dr Fox:** This Government are committed to an open and liberal trading system. One of the best ways to help poor countries is to have even greater liberalisation than we have today. When we are outside the common external tariff of the European Union, Britain will have the opportunity to act unilaterally, which will give us new opportunities, as my hon. Friend rightly suggests.

**Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab):** The 21st century offers us an opportunity to build on our pride and identity as a nation that promotes human rights, workers' rights and environmental protection—all part of fair trade principles. How will the Government build on this part of our national identity in trade negotiations?

**Dr Fox:** We are already playing a full part in that. Britain played a major role in the World Trade Organisation's arrangement that is going to come into effect in just a short time—the trade facilitation agreement.

It will be worth about £70 billion to the global economy, and for some of the poorest countries, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, it will be worth about £10 billion. We made a major contribution to that, and we should be very proud of it.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I have a role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria. In the context of fair trade, will the Secretary of State join me in encouraging the Nigerian Government to share the benefits of trade more widely with their people?

**Dr Fox:** That is a message I will be taking with me when I make a visit to Nigeria in the not-too-distant future.

### Space Exploration Sector

3. **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support trade and investment in the space exploration sector. [908686]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier):** The Department for International Trade supports efforts to grow the UK space sector. We are working closely with the UK Space Agency, Innovate UK and the industry to provide sector growth. In January, I led a DIT and UK Space Agency mission to the US, where I advocated the UK as an attractive market for space sector companies. We intend to highlight progress at the UK space conference in Manchester in May. UK Export Finance offers finance and insurance to help UK-based companies in the space sector.

**Mr Jayawardena:** It is really great to hear that the UK is fast becoming a world leader in the space sector. Will my hon. Friend inform the House about his efforts to secure foreign direct investment into the United Kingdom to support domestic growth in this industry?

**Mark Garnier:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the importance of this sector. The numbers are absolutely fantastic: it has six times the average research and development investment, and it has 2.7 times the average productivity in the UK. During the past couple of years, the DIT has supported 19 successful inward investment projects in this sector, and we will continue to work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to deliver the UK space innovation and growth strategy in the future.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): The encrypted public service channels of the new Galileo space navigation system are restricted to EU member states. What steps will the Government take post-Brexit to ensure that the UK has access to Galileo, in which we have invested?

**Mark Garnier:** Galileo is the satellite navigation system that is being put up by the European Space Agency and the European Union. That is one of the many things we have to negotiate over the coming years. The use of spectrum is incredibly important, because spectrum is limited. The Government will look at that among many other important things, but I assure the hon. Gentleman

that spectrum is a very valuable asset for this country, and we will work with Ofcom to ensure that we get our fair share.

### Technology Sector

4. **Mr Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase exports from and foreign direct investment in the technology sector. [908688]

**The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands):** Since 23 June, the UK has continued to attract investment from global technology companies, including SoftBank's purchase of ARM, Facebook expanding by 50% in the UK, Google pledging to invest an estimated £1 billion, Snapchat's new global headquarters in London and more. This Department additionally promotes and showcases the UK's leading technology capability through our overseas network, and via our recently launched digital platform, GREAT.gov.uk.

**Mr Prisk:** The global market for smart city technologies is now worth something in the region of \$400 billion. British firms lead the way in many of the specialisations, but we could win more contracts if there were a UK approach to a complete smart city solution. I encourage Ministers to promote greater collaboration, both among businesses and between businesses and the Government.

**Greg Hands:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct and I agree with everything he said on the size of the UK capability, the size of the potential market and the need for a "Team UK" approach, which I spoke about recently when I visited his smart cities all-party parliamentary group just two weeks ago. In addition, I can announce today that two UK companies—Carillion and Zaha Hadid Architects—have secured a contract worth tens of millions of pounds to build a new headquarters in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, with support from UK Export Finance, which shows that the UK remains very much open for business.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The No. 1 tech Brexit worry is that when we leave, it will become unlawful to send personal data from Europe to the UK unless we have achieved an adequacy declaration from the European Commission about our data privacy arrangements. Important businesses will overnight become unviable. Will that declaration be achieved in time?

**Greg Hands:** Fortuitously, I was in the Chamber for the earlier Question Time and heard the right hon. Gentleman ask precisely the same question of the Minister for Digital and Culture. The UK is committed to implementing the global agreement, and to ensuring that it works for the UK once we transition outside the European Union.

**Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): I welcome the British Business Bank announcement of £1 billion of funding. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the technology sector gets its fair share so that Britain's leadership in the fourth industrial revolution can continue?

**Greg Hands:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I again praise his work on the fourth industrial revolution both in the House and beyond. He is a key advocate,

not just in the UK but around the world, of ensuring that the UK takes advantage of its very great strengths in technology and its technological expertise.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Figures published by the Centre for Cities show that Glasgow's exports of goods and services to the EU were worth more than £2.5 billion in 2014. Given the importance of Scotland's membership of the single market to the technology sector in Glasgow, will the Minister commit to considering the Scottish Government's proposals in the "Scotland's Place in Europe" paper to keep Scotland in the single market?

**Greg Hands:** I am very sympathetic to Glasgow maintaining its exports and capability in smart cities. The UK and the Department for International Trade follow a whole-UK approach, often working with key partners such as Scotland Development International. However, I would point out to the hon. Lady that Scotland remaining in the United Kingdom is more important. Some four times as much Scottish produce and capability is exported within the United Kingdom than to the European Union.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): British tech firms have been unable to go to two US trade shows, and look unlikely to be able to attend a top conference and exhibition in Singapore, owing to extensive delays by the Minister's Department in announcing trade access partnership funding. Will he go back to the Department and confirm the funding, so that British businesses can attend trade shows and play their part in boosting our exports and economy?

**Greg Hands:** The Department continually reviews its products and services to ensure that it meets its customer needs and represents good value for the taxpayer. Business planning will be completed very shortly, so we will be confirming events shortly.

### Taiwan

5. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): What plans his Department has to increase trade with Taiwan. [908690]

**The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands):** Building on my visit to Taiwan in September, we will continue to work with the Taiwanese authorities to address market access issues and to further increase our trade in this important market. The UK and Taiwan share a strongly favourable outlook on free trade and enjoy a robust trade partnership. Bilateral trade reached £5.9 billion in 2014, up 8% compared with 2010.

**Simon Danczuk:** I am pleased that the Minister met the Taiwanese President in September. I hope he shares my belief that as Britain reaches out to secure more trade deals, we keep in sight our foreign policy values. Does the Minister agree that increased trade with Taiwan and the UK is a win for both our economies and our liberal democratic values?

**Greg Hands:** I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. The UK and Taiwan share so many commitments, including the importance of environmental protection and the importance of a free society. We also have very

strong shared values of free trade, open markets and an openness to foreign investment. I had very productive talks with President Tsai in September. She is a big friend of the United Kingdom, not least because of her time as an undergraduate at the London School of Economics.

10. [908697] **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I know the Minister will be aware that back in 2008 Taiwan was granted Commonwealth Nations Research Society membership. As such, it will be looking to the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting in London in March. Will he confirm that trade with the Commonwealth is a top priority for the Government after we leave the European Union? Will he commit to ensuring that during the trade meeting many Members from all sides of the House can be involved to ensure key relationships with Commonwealth parliamentarians?

**Greg Hands:** Yes. In terms of both trade with Taiwan and the Commonwealth, the Department remains extremely supportive of Members being involved. In relation to the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting, I very much hope the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will be involved in those discussions.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): With trade deals in place for the likes of Bushmills whiskey and Northern Ireland pork products, will the Minister outline how he intends to use that success for other agri-food business products, such as long-life dairy supplied by Lakeland Dairies to 77 countries across the world?

**Greg Hands:** When I held talks with the Taiwan authorities in September, agricultural produce was very much at the centre of those talks. We talked about pork and poultry exports, and we made real progress on Scotch whisky. Taiwan is Scotch whisky's third-largest global market and we made important progress on it being certified by Taiwan.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): I know a lot of British businesses focus on the China market, for obvious reasons, but when I led a delegation to Taiwan in September, as chairman of the British-Taiwanese all-party group, I witnessed a vibrant economy. Does the Minister agree that if British businesses ignore Taiwan they are missing a trick?

**Greg Hands:** I totally agree. I think my hon. Friend and I were in Taiwan at roughly the same time back in September. I applaud the work he does for the all-party group. Taiwan has been a longstanding open market for UK goods and services, and we need to ensure that we work hard to remove the few remaining barriers. That was the purpose of the Joint Economic Trade Committee—or JETCO—talks in September. The message from this House should go out loud and clear to British businesses that Taiwan is a very good place for them to do their business.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Given that the UK currently receives two thirds of all investment into Europe from Taiwan, does my right hon. Friend see any reason why that will not continue after we leave the EU?

**Greg Hands:** No.



### New Business Markets: Cornwall

6. **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to open new markets to businesses in Cornwall in (a) the food and drink and (b) other sectors. [908691]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** The south-west FoodEx directory connects food and drink companies in Cornwall with buyers across the world. Local companies can also benefit from FoodEx workshops. Cornish companies in all sectors can access the full range of Department for International Trade services. We have launched the GREAT.gov.uk website, and our experienced international trade advisers are supporting new Cornish exporters to step into the global marketplace and helping experienced exporters compete in high-growth markets.

**Derek Thomas:** In west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, a flurry of businesses have been producing food, drink and other goods. There is no doubt about the quality of their produce, but the reality is that very few of those products—food and drink—go beyond Cornish borders, let alone overseas. Will the Minister accept an invitation to meet these producers and help them to expand their markets?

**Mark Garnier:** As my hon. Friend knows, my family has roots in Cornwall that go back over 100 years, which I think means that we are now no longer incomers. The Secretary of State, of course, is a south-west MP and I believe he has met Cornish producers, and I am a frequent visitor to the extraordinary county that produces such fabulous produce. At the very first opportunity, I will go with my hon. Friend to meet his constituents and, indeed, people across the whole of Cornwall to explore ways in which we can push this fantastic county's product.

### New Zealand

7. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of New Zealand on future bilateral trade and investment. [908692]

9. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of New Zealand on future bilateral trade and investment. [908694]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** I launched a trade policy dialogue with the New Zealand Trade Minister last October to consider how we can strengthen our economic ties. Last month, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of New Zealand and agreed that preparatory work should be undertaken on the potential for an ambitious new free trade agreement between the UK and New Zealand, once the UK leaves the European Union.

**Mrs Murray:** I warmly welcome the early and constructive dialogue with our colleagues and friends in New Zealand. Will my right hon. Friend do all that he

can to explore every opportunity for bilateral trade with New Zealand, including the natural synergies between our rural economies?

**Dr Fox:** I very much agree. The UK exported over £1.2 billion-worth of goods to New Zealand last year, and opportunities for our rural businesses and farmers will be a very important part of our work as we take forward the dialogue with New Zealand, which I intend to visit over the summer months.

**Robert Courts:** This year the British New Zealand Business Association, which exists to develop trade between our two countries, reaches its centenary. As someone who has worked in New Zealand, I have first-hand experience of the warmth that exists between our two countries. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is hope for, and that we look forward to, a great increase in trade between our countries in the years ahead?

**Dr Fox:** I certainly hope that will be possible, given the freedom that we will have outside the European Union to negotiate such a free trade agreement. It is not just our two countries that will benefit; all countries around the globe will benefit from the new global Britain and our attitude towards global free trade, with all the benefits it brings, especially to the world's poor.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that New Zealand is a land of 30 million sheep—there are six or seven sheep for every person—so has he discussed the impact of a trade deal with the leader of the National Farmers Union? It regards the combination of a 43% World Trade Organisation tariff on sheepmeat and increased market access for New Zealand as potentially fatal to our sheep farmers. How will he protect them?

**Dr Fox:** As I said in answer to an earlier question, that will be an important part of our discussions. We will want to discuss how we do that with the NFU and others, but we also need to take something into account that does not seem to be mentioned very often, which is the interests of UK consumers in any trade deal that we come to.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908708] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** The Department for International Trade has three tasks: promoting UK exports to support a growing economy that serves the whole country; maximising opportunities for wealth creation, including through overseas direct investment to support the current account; and negotiating the best international trading framework for the UK outside the EU. In terms of investment, I can announce to the House this morning that McLaren will be opening a £50 million manufacturing plant in Sheffield that will create 200 new jobs.



**Alan Brown:** Given how desperate the International Trade Secretary is to negotiate a trade deal with the US, what guarantees will he give that Scottish farmers will not be undercut by chlorinated chicken and substandard beef imports?

**Dr Fox:** The quality of produce sold will be a major part of any negotiation, but as for undercutting the Scottish economy, I am regularly told by investors in the United States that one of the things hanging over them and depressing investment opportunities is the threat of separation.

T2. [908710] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I welcome the recent establishment of a UK-Israel trade working group. Bilateral trade between the two countries has increased year on year, and our close co-operation in cyber, academia and medicine continues to grow. Can the Minister provide any further information about how the group will work, and does he share my view that we should strike one of our first trade deals with the middle east's only democracy?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier):** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the very good trading relationship we have, and hope to continue to have, with Israel. The Prime Minister announced the trade working group when the Israeli Prime Minister visited earlier this week, but it is worth bearing it in mind that the EU already has a trade arrangement with Israel, and this is something that, in the first instance, we would look to continue. I am sure, however, that there will be many opportunities to improve on that, given that that trade deal was done between one country and 28 countries, whereas a bilateral deal will be easier to negotiate.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State promised that Parliament would have the opportunity to debate the important comprehensive economic and trade agreement between the EU and Canada on the Floor of the House. Unfortunately, he broke that promise and the debate was sidelined to an obscure Committee of the House earlier this week. Given that the UK will soon be responsible for negotiating its own international trade deals following Brexit, what assurances can the Minister give the House that parliamentarians will have an opportunity to scrutinise such trade deals fully in the future, and not be afforded the discourtesy we unfortunately were in relation to CETA?

**The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands):** It was not an obscure Committee; it was a two-and-a-half hour debate in Committee Room 10 following the proper procedures laid out by the House. I remind the hon. Lady that, at the end of the debate, she failed to oppose CETA, yet the Scottish National party in yesterday's deferred Division voted en masse against it. Like the official Opposition, it changed its position on something that has been debated for eight years now within the space of merely 24 hours.

T5. [908714] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Many Cornish men and women emigrated to seek work in New Zealand in the late 19th century. Will

my hon. Friend now support other great Cornish exports of our wonderful produce, such as Cornish cider produced by Cornish Orchards in my constituency?

**Mark Garnier:** It is good to see the far west of this country being so well represented today, on a one-line Whip just ahead of the recess. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are fantastic products coming from her constituency, including award-winning brands such as Cornish Orchards cider, Cornish Blue and Cornish Gouda. It is absolutely the job of the Department to go out to the rest of the world and, as I said before, to push Cornish exports far beyond the Tamar to the four corners of the globe.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): When I wrote to the Secretary of State in November to ask for an investigation into his Department's support for any British businesses engaged in corrupt practices, he replied that his Department had no power to conduct such an investigation. Last week, after the publicity surrounding Roll-Royce's deferred prosecution, he announced precisely such an investigation. When did the powers of his Department change, when will the inquiry report back, and will he explain why he has refused to comply with the open government principles of the OECD anti-bribery convention?

**Greg Hands:** Rolls-Royce has made it clear that it will not tolerate improper business conduct of any sort. It continues to co-operate fully with the Serious Fraud Office, and we await the final outcome, on which it would not be proper to comment beforehand. UK Export Finance notes, and is reviewing, the statement of facts released as part of the deferred prosecution agreement with regards to Rolls-Royce, but the details of the statement are a matter for the SFO and it would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Continuing the trend of exporting from the south-west, last week Gloucestershire-based SME Fluid Transfer International won a £6 million contract to supply aircraft-refuelling vehicles to Indonesian airports. The key ingredients were British manufacturing, a strong commitment to the market, and a very good local partnership. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Fluid Transfer, and will his Department work with me to produce a short video to capture the story and inspire other small and medium-sized enterprises by showing them what can be achieved?

**Mark Garnier:** I am sure that my hon. Friend played a part in that deal, given that he is a trade envoy to Indonesia and given the extraordinary work that he does in some of the ASEAN countries. We shall all be delighted to help to promote investment of this kind in every way we can.

T3. [908711] **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): A hard Tory Brexit will damage the Scottish aerospace industry, which contributes more than £130 million to the Scottish economy. Will the Secretary of State assure us that that sector will continue to have barrier-free access to the European single market?

**Dr Fox:** It has been the Government's clear aim to ensure that there is tariff and barrier-free access once we have left the European Union, and that is exactly

what we intend to negotiate—and, of course, the Scottish aerospace industry will be all the stronger for being represented by the whole United Kingdom.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that company registration with the use of a Companies House-type model is important to promoting the economies of developing countries that seek foreign direct investment, and is also good news for the UK's financial services sector?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend has made an important general point in his specific question. An open trading system is a win-win: our economy, as well as other economies, can gain from sharing the same open system.

T4. [908712] **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): How many trade negotiators has the civil service now managed to recruit?

**Dr Fox:** The entire departmental strength is now some 3,000. We are adding some 50 extra staff to our trade policy group this week, and the process will continue. We will increase the numbers further in the months ahead as we look to our WTO obligations, the transposition of our EU free trade agreements, and the FTAs that we have. The current number of about 200 staff will be augmented as we proceed.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): As the Secretary of State knows, UK steel is the best in the world. What opportunities does he envisage to promote the sale of it around the world?

**Greg Hands:** We take an ongoing and strong interest in the steel sector. It faces difficulties at present because of the low global steel price, but we see a good future for UK steel, and the Department looks forward to taking part in a whole-of-Government approach to ensuring that it is sold abroad.

## Unaccompanied Child Refugees

10.37 am

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on the Government's decision to close the Dubs scheme for child refugees.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd)**: The Government take the welfare of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children extremely seriously. That is why we have pledged more than £2.3 billion in aid in response to the Syria conflict—our largest ever humanitarian response to a single crisis.

The United Kingdom has contributed significantly to the hosting, supporting and protection of the most vulnerable children affected by the migration crisis. In the year ending September 2016, we granted asylum or another form of leave to more than 8,000 children. About 50% of the 4,400 individuals who have been resettled through the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme so far are children. Within Europe, in 2016, we transferred more than 900 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to the UK, including more than 750 from France as part of the UK's support for the Calais camp clearance. As Home Secretary, I am proud that the UK played such a key role in helping the French to close the camp safely and compassionately.

Yesterday the Government announced that, in accordance with section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016, we would transfer the specified number of 350 children who reasonably meet the intention and spirit behind the provision. That number includes more than 200 children who have already been transferred from France under section 67. I must make it absolutely clear that the scheme is not closed. As required by the legislation, we consulted local authorities on their capacity to care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children before arriving at the number. We are grateful for the way in which local authorities have stepped up to provide places for those arriving, and we will continue to work closely to address capacity needs.

The Government have always been clear that we do not want to incentivise perilous journeys to Europe, particularly by the most vulnerable children. That is why children must have arrived in Europe before 20 March 2016 to be eligible under section 67 of the Immigration Act. The section 67 obligation was accepted on the basis that the measure would not act as a pull factor for children to travel to Europe and that it would be based on local authority capacity. The Government have a clear strategy and we believe this is the right approach.

Here in the UK, we have launched the national transfer scheme and we have also significantly increased funding for local authorities caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by between 20% and 28%. The Government have taken significant steps to improve an already comprehensive approach and we are providing protection to thousands of children in this year. I am proud of this Government's active approach to helping and sheltering the most vulnerable, and that is a position that will continue.

**Yvette Cooper**: Last week the Prime Minister said:

"On refugees, this Government have a proud record of the support...and long may it continue."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2017; Vol. 620, c. 1016.]

This week, the Government cancelled the Dubs scheme after it had been running for less than six months. The Home Secretary said that it has not closed, but will she confirm what it said in the statement yesterday: that once those 350 children are here, that is it—it is closed? Where does it say in the *Hansard* record of our debates on the Dubs amendment that I have here that we will help lone child refugees for only six months? Where does it say that, instead of the 3,000 that Parliament debated, we will help only one tenth of that number? Where does it say that when we get the chance we will somehow turn our backs once again? It does not, because we did not say that at the time.

The Home Secretary knows that what she is doing is shameful. Not only has she closed the Dubs programme, but she has cancelled the fast-track Dublin scheme to help those with family here. The Home Secretary did very good work in the autumn of last year to help those in Calais and to make sure we could take as many children as possible, and I commended her for it. But she also knows that most of those have family here already and were entitled to be here. She has said local councils cannot do more; the truth is that many local councils have said they can do more with more support or more time. It takes time to set up these schemes, and they should not be closed down so quickly.

There are still so many children in need of help. The Home Secretary knows there are thousands in Greece in overcrowded accommodation or homeless, or in Italy still at risk of human trafficking, or teenagers in French centres, which are being closed down now, who have nowhere left to go. The Home Secretary talked about clearing Calais; they are heading back to Calais, and back to Dunkirk: back to the mud, back to the danger, back into the arms of the people traffickers and the smugglers, the exploitation, the abuse, the prostitution rings—back into the modern slavery that this Parliament and this Government have pledged to end.

We know Britain and France can both do better. There are Eritrean teenagers here now in foster homes, after awful trafficking experiences, who are in school with a better future. We can do this; Britain can do better than this. Will the Home Secretary accept that and reinstate the Dubs programme now?

**Amber Rudd**: I have listened carefully to the right hon. Lady's questions and I will try to address them all.

I repeat that the Dubs amendment that is in place is not closed. We have done what we were obliged to do, and we have correctly put a number on it. The right hon. Lady implies that this is a business of accepting the children and that it is all about numbers; I respectfully say to her that these are children who need looking after over a period. When we accept them here, it is not job done; it is about making sure that we work with local authorities and that we have the right safeguarding in place. That is why we engage with local authorities—why we make sure they have sufficient funds, which we have increased, to look after those young people.

I completely reject the right hon. Lady's attack. The UK has a strong reputation in Europe and internationally for looking after the most vulnerable. That will continue. We have a different approach to where the most vulnerable are. We believe that they are in the region, and that is why we have made a pledge to accept 3,000 children from the region. We are committed to delivering on that. They are the most vulnerable.



[Amber Rudd]

I am clear, through working with my French counterparts, that they do not want us to continue to accept children under the Dubs amendment indefinitely. They specify that that acts as a draw, and I agree with them—*[Interruption.]* It acts as a pull. It encourages the people traffickers. I know that the right hon. Lady does not want that, and I ask her to think very carefully about the approach that she prefers.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I am very much aware of the great shortage of resources in Wycombe, so I commend the Home Secretary for the resilience she is showing under this strident attack. Will she reassure me that the Government will remain committed to bringing refugee children here where that is appropriate and that she will have due regard to the children we already have?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We are always grateful for the work that local authorities do. We must not underestimate the difficulties involved, particularly in taking children who have been through war zones. We work with them to ensure that they deliver the extra work and care that those children need. He is also right to suggest that we must ensure that the children in the UK are always looked after.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Last year, I visited a number of refugee camps in Europe, including some in Lesbos. I met the Red Cross volunteers who were saving refugees from the sea, and they said to me that the worst thing was the children. The worst thing about this Government's failure to step up to the totality of the refugee crisis is the children. In a written statement yesterday, the Minister for Immigration said:

"All children not transferred to the UK are in the care of the French authorities."

They might technically be the responsibility of the French authorities, but many of those children are not being cared for at all. They are sleeping on the streets and in informal encampments, and they are making their way back to Calais, to Dunkirk and to the mud. Will the Home Secretary tell me how the UK plans to find, screen and process the 150 extra Dubs children, and from which countries they will be transferred? What conversations has the Home Office had with the French, Italian and Greek Governments regarding taking such a small number of children? How does she live with herself when she is leaving thousands of people—*[Interruption.]* Members opposite can jeer, but I ask her how she can live with herself when she is leaving thousands of children subject to disease, people trafficking, squalor and hopelessness.

**Amber Rudd:** I share one thing with the hon. Lady: it is the children who matter most. We have a disgraceful situation on the borders of Europe, with so many people being trafficked through to Italy and, in the past, to Greece to meet their desire to come to Europe. Too often, they find themselves in the hands of the people traffickers. It is because we care in this way that we have put together our plan to take the refugees from the most vulnerable places. She says she doubts that the children in France are being looked after, but I can tell her that

the children who are most vulnerable are the ones in the camps in Jordan and Lebanon. They are the ones who are really vulnerable, and they are the ones we are determined to bring over here, to give them the benefit of safety in the UK.

I would also say to the hon. Lady that I do speak to my European counterparts about the best way to help the refugees who are now coming to Europe in such numbers. The French are very clear that they are processing the children who have come out of the Calais camp, and they want to continue to do that, but one of the things that stops the children operating with the French authorities is the hope of being taken into the Dubs scheme and coming to the UK. The authorities are clear with us that if they are to manage those children and do the best thing for them—which is what I want and, I think, what the hon. Lady wants—making it clear that the scheme is not going to be open indefinitely will provide the best outcome for them.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I do not doubt the sincerity of Opposition Members, but this situation was a classic dilemma when I was chair of the all-party parliamentary group on human trafficking and modern slavery. If we continue to take unaccompanied children into this country, more and more will be taken from Syria and across the dreadful sea routes, with many dying, and we will be feeding and encouraging human trafficking. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) is sincere, but she is absolutely wrong. I urge the Home Secretary to continue to take people from Syria, but to abandon taking them from Europe, which encourages human trafficking.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend has substantial experience in this area having worked so hard on the issue of human trafficking. I note his point about this being a dilemma. It is not always clear what the right strategy is, but I ask Opposition Members to recognise that we are taking a different approach. It is honest and compassionate—they do not have a monopoly on that—and we can deliver the best. I urge them to support us in that aim.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am struggling to understand exactly what the Home Secretary is telling us. She says that the scheme is not closed, but she seems to have specified a number of 350, so that must mean that the scheme is closing once the 350 children get here. Will she clarify that? If that is the case, does she appreciate that that goes completely against the spirit of what was discussed in this House? I understand the "pull" argument, but thousands of children are already in Europe and many of them are unaccompanied and vulnerable.

Lord Alfred Dubs described what was done yesterday as "shabby" and deceitful. It seems that the Government tried to sneak out what they knew would be an unpopular announcement when they were busy avoiding scrutiny of the Brexit deal in this House. Is that the shape of things to come? Is that what comes from cosyng up to President Trump?

**Amber Rudd:** I expected better from the hon. and learned Lady. Clearly, she did not listen to my point that taking this view is in the interests of the children we are helping. Instead, she is casting aspersions. There has



been no attempt to hide anything. If there had been, today might have been the day to put out the written ministerial statement, not yesterday, because here I am to answer the urgent question—I am delighted to do so—and to provide clarity on any misunderstanding.

As for the hon. and learned Lady's first comment about the number, the scheme is still open because we expect to transfer another 150 children. We have Home Office representatives in Greece and Italy to ensure that we can do that. In accordance with what the regulations set out, we had to put a number on it after consulting local authorities, and that is what we have done.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): The Secretary of State says that the scheme is not closed, so I urge her to respect the House: when we voted on the Dubs amendment, we never expected the scheme to close at all. Does she agree that Britain should be leading the way? There should be more resources for local authorities. Will the Government consider reintroducing a Minister for refugees, not just for Syrian refugees, to show the importance that we give to this 21st-century problem?

**Amber Rudd:** I know that my hon. Friend cares a lot about this issue, just as I and this Government do. That is why we have made substantial commitments to help children from the region and to help 20,000 Syrians to come over here. I can say that we are transferring 100 people under the Syrian scheme just today. We will continue to step up and show the world that the UK is doing the right thing by helping these families and children.

I disagree with my hon. Friend and some Opposition Members on one thing. At the time of the amendment, it was made perfectly clear that a number needed to be set and that a number would be set. We have stuck to the letter and spirit of the amendment.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary says that she has talked to the French authorities and that they want to stop the Dubs scheme. An average of 50 children every day are going back to Calais and the camps. Does the Home Secretary recognise that the policy clearly is not working? What does she think will happen to those kids now that she has closed the door on them?

**Amber Rudd:** I ask the hon. Lady to consider why the children are going back to the camps rather than staying in the centres the French have taken them to in order to process them. Perhaps it is because they think that they will be able to move to the UK. Does that help them? It does not. What will help those children is if they have their claims processed in France, rather than going back to Calais and the mud. I am sure that she would not want that, just as I do not.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Like Lord Dubs, I have Jewish ancestry and I find it distasteful when some commentators compare the situation today with the 1930s and the Kindertransport. In those days, there was no opportunity to go to Germany or other Axis countries and assist those children who faced death in concentration camps. This situation is very different. Will my right hon. Friend condemn those commentators—thankfully, there have been none so far in this House—who compare the situation in the 1930s with today?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is not the same. Perhaps the one comparison one might make is the condition, sometimes, of the camps out in the region, some of which are in a terrible situation. We should put all our effort there to make sure that we take the children that we can from that most vulnerable area.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Tens of thousands of refugees stranded in Greece, including hundreds of unaccompanied children, are living in appalling conditions and face immense and avoidable suffering. Yet last year the Government took only five Dublin children from the area and none under Dubs. What will the Home Secretary do proactively to seek out those who could benefit from Dublin transfers?

**Amber Rudd:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have staff in the region who are looking to see which children might qualify under the Dubs amendment and which children might qualify under the Dublin regulations. We are actively looking to make sure that we do assist the children in Greece and Italy that we can.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): While the Dubs amendment is one part of the overall strategy on refugees, does my right hon. Friend agree that the UK's record on the full strategy has been exemplary and our biggest humanitarian contribution in our history?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The UK has stepped forward financially and with support for refugees. We will take 20,000 by 2020, about half of whom will be children. He, the House and the country can be proud of the UK's commitment to helping refugees and the most vulnerable.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Prime Minister never misses an opportunity to tell us that she wants to see Britain as an outward-looking player with a global vision. May I say gently to the Home Secretary that on this issue she has an opportunity to demonstrate that this country's global vision is about more than just trade deals? Limiting our ambition to less than 1% of the desperate children who need to be helped is not worthy of that vision. Will she look at the way in which she uses the Dublin regulations? They include discretionary clauses that could be used more effectively to identify children with family links already in the UK, to ensure that they are helped.

**Amber Rudd:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the Dublin arrangements. Until we had an accelerated process and really leant in to identify children who qualified under the Dublin arrangements into Calais, it was not really working. The numbers of children being transferred under Dublin previously were small. We managed to transfer nearly 600 under Dublin last year, and I now feel that the Home Office and associated organisations that help us to deliver on Dublin have learnt how to make sure that it operates better in the future. I am confident that those numbers will improve going forward.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): A two-tier—in fact, multi-tier—system in response to refugees and asylum seekers is emerging, with incomprehensible

[Thangam Debbonaire]

contradictions and many vulnerabilities, especially for children. To live up to our well-deserved reputation, which we should be proud of as a nation, among those fleeing war and persecution, who see us as a place of safe haven, and to do our best for a fair share of the thousands who are arriving in Europe—desperate, but with huge potential to offer this country—will the Home Secretary commit to appointing a Minister for refugees and integration?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for her recommendation. I have a substantial ministerial team and an excellent Minister for Immigration. I do not see the need at the moment for additional Ministers, but of course I will keep that under review.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): The UK is helping the most vulnerable children in the region, and I agree that that must be the principal focus of our effort to avoid a pull factor. However, having committed to resettlement from Europe, we should revise our approach only after very careful thought. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this announcement follows the clear advice of our French friends and allies?

**Amber Rudd:** I reassure my hon. Friend that I work closely with my European counterparts, particularly in France, because many young people arrive in the camps in northern France and create an environment that is so difficult for themselves and for the local authorities. Yes, I will always work closely, particularly with the French, to ensure that our plans work with theirs.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary agree that the secret to reforming the system in this country is a fair dispersal of refugees and asylum seekers? My city is happy, with some strain, to take hundreds of asylum seekers every year but there have never been any asylum seekers welcomed in the constituencies of the present Prime Minister, the previous Prime Minister or the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer. Will she look at that situation?

**Amber Rudd:** I am proud that my constituency of Hastings and Rye does welcome asylum seekers. The hon. Gentleman is of course right that we want more constituencies to welcome asylum seekers. Indeed, under the national transfer scheme, which allows some councils to help other councils where a lot of these children arrive, we are encouraging local authorities to step forward, on a voluntary basis, to spread the support around. The fact is that, at one point, Kent had to look after more than 1,000 children who had arrived unaccompanied. We must do more to spread that out, and I urge right hon. and hon. Members to speak to their local authorities about taking advantage of the scheme.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Those who traffic and abuse young children across Europe really do meet the modern definition of evil people committing evil acts. What are the British security services and police, together with their European counterparts, doing to track down, arrest and prosecute these perpetrators of evil?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend raises such an important point. He is absolutely right that we will always make sure that we combat human trafficking and the misery and abuse that go with it. I work closely with my European counterparts to make sure that we share information. Our National Crime Agency carefully tracks serious organised crime groups, and Europol works with us and other European partners to make sure that we work across Europe to guard against the terrible damage done by these people.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Home Secretary is a good person, so I am not here to make a personal attack on her, but what signal does she think this sends to the world in the wake of President Trump's announcement last week, albeit in a different context? There are always those who say that we should look after our own, that charity begins at home—"Britain first", "America first", "France first" and so on. Does she want us to be aligned with that sentiment or a different one?

**Amber Rudd:** We are not saying that we are closing the door and pulling up the drawbridge. I urge the right hon. Gentleman and hon. Members on both sides of the House not to fall into the trap of suggesting that we are not a country that welcomes refugees. We are stepping up to our obligations and supporting the most vulnerable with money and refugee programmes. I do not recognise the comparison he is making, and I hope that other Members share my position.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Like several other Members of this House, I saw for myself the conditions in Calais. I thank my right hon. Friend for her work to transfer children with family in the UK from France to the UK. As she has said, in Kent we look after more than 1,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Does she agree that, when we welcome vulnerable children to the UK, we must make sure that we can give them a genuine welcome, with councils having the resources and capacity to look after them as well as British children in need of care?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The fact is that we are so fortunate that Kent does step up, because it so often takes the brunt and has to take the largest number of unaccompanied children. We need other councils to engage with the national transfer scheme so that we can spread that responsibility around. My hon. Friend also makes a good point about the need not to feel that it is "job done" when we take the children in. We need to have care, time, money and professional support to look after these refugees, because they are children, they are here, and we will make sure they are looked after.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): Regarding the unfortunate remarks made by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), is it not the case that what he referred to was an act of common humanity at the time, and it is no less now? It is the same, as far as children are concerned.

**Amber Rudd:** People will use their own language, but it seems clear to me that the most vulnerable place where there are children we can help is the region itself.

We have agreed to take 3,000 of those children by 2020, and we will absolutely be sticking to that. About half of the 20,000 that are coming from Syria by 2020 will be children, and we will continue to move the children we can to take them under the Dublin arrangements.

**Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): British charities are working hard on the ground in the Syria region to help young people. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State continue to support their work and to tackle the people-trafficking networks that are exploiting their situation?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is of course right about British charities. The British Government are the second-largest bilateral donor in the region, and we are proud of that. We work closely to make sure that part of the support that we give goes towards helping children and helping to educate them so that we do not have a generation who grow up without any schooling. We are very focused on making sure that we support the people and the children in the region, as well as fulfilling our obligations under refugee arrangements.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am genuinely struggling to understand how it could possibly be in the best interests of vulnerable lone children for us not to take more of them in. I just do not understand what kind of perverse global leadership this is. If we have the compassion and humanity—and, indeed, the capacity, which we do—to take in more, why are we not doing so? Will the Secretary of State please take the feeling from the House today and think about changing the decision she has made about these lone refugee children?

**Amber Rudd:** I respect the hon. Lady's views, but they are different from the one we take. That is not because of a lack of compassion, though; it is basically about trying to work out what is best for those children. She has failed to acknowledge the point that several Members have made, and that I have made as well: if we continue to take numbers of children from European countries, particularly France, that will act as a magnet for the traffickers. I wonder whether she has come across traffickers, or children who have been trafficked. It is a terrible crime and such danger is done to lives. It is imperative that we take action here to protect those children and stop that crime. Part of our process, by focusing on the most vulnerable from the region, tries to do exactly that.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): We should applaud all councils, individuals and families who have stepped up to the plate to assist these vulnerable children. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether the capacity of councils throughout the country to host these children has met, exceeded or disappointed the Government's expectations?

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend is right that part of the proposal was to make sure that local authorities can support these children. We need to ensure that when the children arrive, it is not a feeling of “job done,” and that they are supported over the few years, however young or old they are, to make sure they have a good life here. We consulted with councils, and they came up with the

number 400. I remind the House that that is not the total number that councils take in; we have an average of 3,000 unaccompanied minors arriving in addition to that, which councils generously step forward and support. My hon. Friend is right: we should all thank them very much for the work they do.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am very surprised that the Home Secretary did not understand the depth of feeling in the House and make a statement to the House on this announcement, rather than publishing it in a written ministerial statement yesterday. I am really struggling to understand how, if we put a cap of 350 on the scheme, that is not closing the scheme. Perhaps the Home Secretary can explain that one more time.

**Amber Rudd:** Under the Immigration Act 2016, we were required, by a date that is fast approaching, to name a number after having consulted with local councils. We have now done that. At some point, the scheme will close, but it is not closed yet, because we still need to transfer 150 under the amendment.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend has already pointed out the disparity that exists in the dispersal of these vulnerable young children. What more can she do to ensure that they are received across the country in a variety of local authorities so that they have the opportunity to have the life that we all want for them?

**Amber Rudd:** That is a very good question. We have been working closely with local authorities. People in my Department have made presentations across the country, and more than 400 people have attended them. We are helping local authorities to step up by ensuring that they have sufficient support each year for the young people. I hope that they see this as the right thing to do when we are experiencing so many problems from the region and refugees arriving here. We are working with local authorities on a persuasion basis and urging them to participate. The sign is that more of them are stepping up.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): When I spend time with my young niece and nephew, I often wonder what would happen to them if they were in similar circumstances. I would hope and pray that they found a country of compassion, safety and sanctuary, and that is what we want for all young children across the world. However, on that basis, can the Home Secretary tell us what discussions she and her Department have had with Lord Dubs and children's charities before making this decision?

**Amber Rudd:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that my Department meets regularly with children's charities and Lord Dubs.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): When the former Prime Minister announced that Britain would take 20,000 Syrian refugees, West Oxfordshire district council led the way in laying out the scheme, quite contrary to what the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) said. West Oxfordshire has taken six Syrian refugee families. I know that, because I chaired the Committee that



[Robert Courts]

helped to settle them in west Oxfordshire and I have met some of them. Does the Home Secretary agree that, although it is necessary that we take in as many children as we can, it is also important to ensure that councils have the capacity to help these families? We are constrained not by money, but by issues such as the availability of translators.

**Amber Rudd:** My hon. Friend makes a helpful point. We want to make sure that the refugees who arrive here—children, families and adults—are looked after in the best tradition of the UK. I am delighted to hear of his personal involvement. I have heard fantastic stories about local churches and local charities stepping up and ensuring that these frightened families are really well looked after. We sometimes see the real best of British values.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): We are told that the scheme is not closed; it will just be capped and discontinued. Hearts seem to be closed—that is the message that is going out. The Home Secretary attributes a lot of calculation to those desperate, lonely children who are making their way back to the camps. Is it not the case that what we are being treated to is calculated indifference dressed up as a measured commitment? Will the Government do more in respect of both Dubs and Dublin?

**Amber Rudd:** It is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman clearly has not heard a word of what I have been saying about the efforts that the UK is going to, the generosity of local authorities, and the commitment from the international aid budget. Those are all strong pieces of evidence to show that this country and this Government are stepping up to their responsibilities.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): Having been to Domiz refugee camp on the Iraq border, I am particularly proud of Britain's biggest ever response to a humanitarian crisis, which amounts to £2.3 billion. Will the Home Secretary confirm that if communities and councils want to continue with the scheme and also to take more vulnerable young refugees in the future, they will be welcome to do so?

**Amber Rudd:** We always welcome initiatives from local councils to ensure that we look after the refugees and children who come over here. I urge any local authorities that think they can do more to get in touch with the national transfer scheme, which will support the councils that are, sometimes, having to accommodate too many children in their area and long for additional support.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): French centres are closing, and there are children in Dunkirk—in today's freezing weather—who have families in this country and were hoping to be considered. Will their needs be assessed if the Dubs scheme is not closed? If not, what does the Home Secretary expect will happen to them?

**Amber Rudd:** The French have transferred the young people—indeed, all the people—from the Calais camp to centres, where they were given beds and food, so that

their applications for asylum could be considered. The hon. Lady is right that some camps are now beginning to form in northern France. I am in constant touch with my French counterparts, and we are helping them with money, support and advice to ensure that another camp like that does not emerge. The French are committed, and they have a responsibility to allow the people there to apply for asylum in France, which is where that should happen. We will continue to monitor where we can help and act on the Dublin arrangements.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said that there will always be some who say that charity begins at home. He is right, but the important thing is that charity does not stop at home. It never has done in this country and it never will do, which is why I applaud the Home Secretary's comments that recognise the great work that has been done, that is still being done and that will continue to be done to help children and refugees from Syria in general. I commend the work of Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

I regret that the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made some very personal comments about the Home Secretary today. Surely it is time for all Members of this House to realise that, whatever our differences of opinion about the right way forward, everybody—particularly Ministers in the Department responsible—starts from the same position of wanting to do the best thing.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. It is disappointing when people do not recognise that the Government and the Opposition both share the ambition of compassion, but have a different strategy for delivering it.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Many in this House have listened to the Home Secretary with total disbelief. We cannot understand, given the intensity of the debate around the Alf Dubs amendment, which was accepted by this House, why she has come forward with what is essentially the closure of the scheme at a number well below what any of us would have expected. Does she not agree that the reality is that many children in desperate need across Europe will be left with no hope?

**Amber Rudd:** No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have communicated our plan to the French and to other European countries, and we have discussed with them what is best for these children. Like so many other hon. Members, he fails to listen to my points about how these children are made vulnerable and what is in their best interest. I respectfully ask him to reconsider his very high moral tone. Although he might not agree with it, we are doing what we believe is best for those children.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): You're not.

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady is chuntering, but we are doing what we believe is best. I recognise that the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) has a different position, but I ask him to reconsider his language.



**Mr Speaker:** The capacity of the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) to chunter from a sedentary position is not in doubt and does not require proof, but she should desist. I very politely say to her that as she is a supporter of West Ham—[*Interruption.*] Well, I am glad she is an Arsenal supporter, but she still should not chunter. As she represents West Ham, she might find it therapeutic to blow some bubbles.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): As part of our commitments under the Dubs amendment, we have consulted local authorities on capacity. It is clear that there is capacity to support the children whom we intend to take from Calais at the same time as meeting our other commitments. I find it unbelievable that councils would be willing to take in only an average of two children each. Did the Home Office ask all local authorities individually how many children they could actually take, or did it suggest numbers to each of them?

**Amber Rudd:** No, we did not suggest numbers to the councils. We set out for them what the challenges were and what our payments were—those had been increased by 20% on one scale and 28% on another, so under-16s were to get £41,000 of support a year and over-16s were to get £33,000. We urged councils, we worked with them and we did presentations all around the country, and the councils came back to us with this proposed number. I repeat that accepting the children is one thing; having the capacity—and, indeed, the confidence—to look after them is what we urge local authorities to think about. I would like to give particular thanks to the Scottish authorities that did so much to accept vulnerable young women, in particular, who were moved from Calais. They are now making their life in Scotland, and we are very grateful for that.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Contrary to what the Secretary of State seems to believe, civil society in my constituency—and, I am sure, many other constituencies—is ready to help the Dubs children. In the past few days, I have visited my local council; St Christopher's Fellowship, which took in about 30 of the Calais children last year; and Hammersmith and Fulham Refugees Welcome, which sources accommodation locally for refugees. They all want to do their bit, so why will the Government not let them?

**Amber Rudd:** We are very grateful for the work that Hammersmith has done. I would urge it to also consider taking children who are just as vulnerable from the national transfer scheme. It is not just the children from Calais who need help, but those from the national transfer scheme. I urge the hon. Gentleman to have that conversation with his council as well.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The closure of the Dubs scheme will affect the most vulnerable child refugees who have been persecuted by Daesh, including Yazidis, 90% of whom are ineligible under the Syrian scheme and none of whom have been resettled in the United Kingdom. Many are trapped in countries in the Mediterranean. Given the UK's role in Iraq over the past decade, is this where our legacy of aiding Iraqi citizens ends?

**Amber Rudd:** The UK position on aiding refugees from the region, which I think is what the hon. Gentleman is asking me about, is very strong. It is added to by the fact that we have one of the largest aid donation plans in the world, with our 0.7% commitment and the £2.3 billion that goes into the region. The hon. Gentleman should join me in being proud of the commitment and support, including financial support, that we give to the region to make sure we do look after vulnerable people.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I have seen at first hand the work of my local authority in Torfaen to assist refugees, but what sort of moral and political lead does the Home Secretary think the Government are giving by doing only the bare minimum under the Dubs scheme?

**Amber Rudd:** I would in no way identify what the Government and local authorities are doing as the bare minimum. We are taking 3,000 children from the region by 2020. We are taking 20,000 vulnerable citizens by 2020. We are making sure that we give them the financial support that they need. I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's characterisation.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As others have pointed out, the Home Secretary says that the Dubs scheme is not closed but the UK needs to send out a strong message against the pull factor. Both those statements cannot be correct. She also says she is still working within the spirit and intention of the Dubs scheme. If that is the case, will she confirm what she is doing to ask councils to take in more children rather than hiding behind the excuse that capacity has already been reached?

**Amber Rudd:** There is no hiding here. Another 150 children will be transferred over the next period under the Dubs agreement. We are working closely with local authorities to ensure that they have the support for the children they have said they will take. I would add that approximately 3,000 unaccompanied children a year already arrive. In addition to the Dubs commitment, local authorities work with us through the national transfer scheme to ensure that those children are looked after.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): What assessment has been made of the numbers of children in Greece and Italy? The charities that have been working with many of those children believed that they would be eligible under the Dubs amendment? How many of those children will now not be eligible?

**Amber Rudd:** I cannot say how many children will or will not be eligible until those assessments have been made, but I can say that, having accepted 200 children under the Dubs amendment, there will be another 150. In addition to that, we will continue to assess the children to see whether they are eligible for the Dublin arrangements.

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): We talk about numbers, but surely the only measure that matters is whether a child is vulnerable. On the bigger picture, I have been lucky enough to visit seven internally displaced person and refugee camps. There is a disparity between

[Graham Jones]

those camps as some have very poor standards, whereas standards are high in others. The Government seem to be doing nothing to help the people in some of the poor camps. I have visited Harran camp, north of Raqqa, which is of a very high standard and provides good education, whereas some of the other camps are exceedingly poor. What are the Home Secretary and the Government doing to help the people living in these camps and to sort out this problem?

**Amber Rudd:** We work closely with the organisations that run some of these camps. I absolutely recognise that they are of differing standards. However, the UK is stepping up with a financial commitment of £2.3 billion to make sure that we help to make those camps places where families can exist and children can be taught. I want the hon. Gentleman to be in no doubt that we lean in to make sure that we assist in the vast movement of people that is taking place in the region.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As chair of the all-party group on disability, my understanding was that the most vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, were to be prioritised, so how many children with disabilities have arrived, and what are the arrangements for vulnerable disabled refugee children who are now left behind?

**Amber Rudd:** At the time of the clearance of the Calais camp, in particular, we were determined to prioritise the most vulnerable. That was why we immediately moved to remove a lot of girls and young women whom we believed—the evidence showed this—were most vulnerable to being trafficked. We will always ensure that we prioritise those young people who are more likely to be vulnerable. I do not have the information on the numbers of disabled people who have been transferred, but I will endeavour to get it and get back to the hon. Lady.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I know that just one Christian charity in London is housing more than 30 children, which appears to be 10% of the entire national effort. Many faith communities are willing to step up to do what we would like the Government to do themselves. If they want to do more, will the Home Secretary let them?

**Amber Rudd:** There is still plenty of need for support from community organisations such as churches. I, too, have met several that are doing their bit to welcome families and look after children. I urge the hon. Gentleman to get in touch through the national transfer scheme,

or via my office, and we will work closely to make sure that any communities groups that think they can support families or children are able to do so.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I am glad to hear that another 150 children will be coming to the UK under this scheme before it closes, but is the Secretary of State able to look the 151st child in the eye and say no?

**Amber Rudd:** I wonder how the hon. Lady would feel about the children who are in the camps in the region. They are not in France or Italy; they are the ones in the camps where the conditions are much, much worse. How would she feel about looking them in the eye?

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Is this not a shameful betrayal of not just the thousands of children being denied a secure future, but the tens of thousands of our constituents who signed petitions and wrote letters in support of the Dubs amendment? No one is suggesting that this country is not welcoming of refugees, but it increasingly appears that the Government are not.

**Amber Rudd:** I would urge the hon. Gentleman to correct any misunderstandings that anybody has. The fact is that we have stuck to the agreement in the Dubs amendment. We were obliged to put out a number, having consulted local authorities. Perhaps he would consider putting out a message to his constituents so that they are clear that the Government are stepping up their commitments, are taking 20,000 by 2020, and are looking after these children. We are proud of our response.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Last week I met staff at the tech company Equator, who volunteered to create a digital classroom project for the 150 children at the La Linière camp in Dunkirk. Those children are stuck there. As everybody in this country—organisations, companies and individuals—seems to be willing to do something to help, what kind of signal does it send out when the Government are not meeting their commitments?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady should be clear that the Government are meeting their commitments, and exceeding them, through the aid that we give to the region of £2.3 billion, through our commitment to making sure that we bring over from the region the most vulnerable children—20,000 by 2020—and, most of all, through making sure that the children who arrive here, who are often from vulnerable areas, are looked after and given support. We ensure that local authorities have this ability. We should be proud of our response.

**Mr Speaker:** Before we proceed to the business question, I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on his 82nd birthday and on reaching the mid-point of his parliamentary career.

## Business of the House

11.29 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** Before I answer the hon. Lady's question, I associate myself with your congratulations, Mr Speaker, to the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn).

The business for the week commencing 20 February will be as follows:

**MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY**—Remaining stages of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill [*Lords*] followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill.

**TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY**—Remaining stages of the Criminal Finances Bill followed by motions relating to the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2017 and the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2017.

**WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY**—Motions relating to the police grant and local government finance reports.

**THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY**—Opposition day (un-allotted half day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Democratic Unionist Party followed by business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY**—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 27 February will include:

**MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY**—Estimates day (1st allotted day). Subject to be confirmed by the Liaison Committee.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 23 and 27 February will be as follows:

**THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY**—Debate on publicly accessible amenities for disabled people followed by a debate on the second report from the Transport Committee on road traffic law enforcement.

**MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY**—Debate on an e-petition relating to attacks on NHS medical staff.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. May I add my birthday wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who is my predecessor? I bought his book, and I found it very handy when I first came into the House.

Will there be business questions on Thursday 20 July, or will that be allocated as a pre-recess adjournment day? Can the Leader of the House tell us whether there will be any progress on a debate in Government time on restoration and renewal? In the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), I note that the Leader of the House has allocated an Opposition day on 23 February. Is that going to be a regular occurrence, and will he ensure that the debates that have been listed by the Backbench Business Committee also have a day allocated to them?

It was 25 years ago this week that the Maastricht treaty was signed. This week, in responding to and respecting the referendum, we have voted to trigger article 50 and leave the EU. In July, the Prime Minister said, "Brexit means Brexit". The Opposition asked, "What does that mean?" The Opposition asked, "Do

you have a plan and a White Paper?" Seven months later, we had a speech at Lancaster House, and eight months later we have a White Paper—which is the speech, with a few graphs. On page 9, in paragraph 1.4, the White Paper states that the Government

"will bring forward a White Paper on the Great Repeal Bill".

Will that be a further White Paper and, if so, when will it be published? Could the Leader of the House ensure that it is not published on the day of the Queen's Speech, whenever that is?

Businesses wanted to stay in the single market, and there is the prospect of losing 32,000 jobs in financial services. Could we have a statement on what the Government will do to protect those jobs and secure London's place as the No. 1 financial centre, as ranked by the global financial centres index? The EU budget is mentioned only twice in the White Paper, both times in section 8.51, which consists of 83 words. Will the Government be revealing more words and, more importantly, figures on the budget in a statement?

Could we have a definition of "frictionless" negotiations? The word appears 12 times in the White Paper. Can the Leader of the House tell us whether the concession made on Tuesday by the Minister on a vote before the final deal was an example of frictionless negotiations—that is to say, meaningless and not to be trusted?

Labour Members tabled amendments to put the case for those who voted to remain and for the country, but it was a sad day when the Government voted down all the amendments so that the Prime Minister could say that the Bill was unamended. The Prime Minister delivered for her party, but not for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

The Government will want to take note, in negotiations, that the Serious Fraud Office has found that Rolls-Royce admitted it used multimillion pound bribes to secure export orders and received financial support from the Government's credit agency in 1991, when it paid a \$2 million bribe to win a contract with Indonesia. There is a review, so may we have a statement on what safeguards there will be to ensure that, as the Government negotiate trade deals around the world in 730 days' time, there will not be a repeat of this?

At Prime Minister's questions yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister three times whether a special deal was offered to Surrey for social care. The Prime Minister was dismissive, and did not answer the question. If there is no special deal for Surrey, why did the Prime Minister simply not confirm that? I and other hon. Members want a memorandum of understanding to secure our libraries and social care, so may we have a statement on Surrey-gate and the discussions Nick and Dave had about securing an MOU?

Turning to House matters, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) has had his Child Poverty in the UK (Target for Reduction) Bill talked out yet again. I have previously raised the issue of Bills being talked out, which makes Parliament look petty. How can we move forward on the Procedure Committee recommendation about a time limit under Standing Order No. 47, given that the Government response of 16 January says that they will not accept that? How can we progress this matter and break this impasse? Many hard-working Members who have worked hard on their Bills want to see them get through.



[Valerie Vaz]

May we have a debate on early-day motion 890, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), which has been signed by 201 Members, including Front Benchers?

*[That this House deplores recent actions taken by US President Donald J Trump, including his Executive Order on Immigration and Refugees, and notably his comments on torture and women; notes the historical significance and honour that comes with an invitation to address both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall or elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster; and calls on the Speaker, Lord Speaker, Black Rod and Serjeant at Arms to withhold permission from the Government for an address to be made in Westminster Hall, or elsewhere in the Palace of Westminster, by President Trump.]*

When a person refers to a senator, Elizabeth Warren, as Pocahontas and she is then silenced by her party; when a person repeats the cry “Lock her up” of a candidate when no offence has been committed; when a person suggests women should be grabbed in certain places without their consent; when a person has consistently questioned the birthplace of a president, President Obama; when a person wants “America first”, but made his business investments anywhere but America; when a person has a key adviser who ran an alt-right website and whose appointment was welcomed by the Ku Klux Klan; and when a person forgets there were native Americans or first nations before he arrived in the US, then I—born in Aden, Yemen, of Goan Indian heritage, who may or may not be directly affected by the travel ban—and others welcome the support given to us and to the reputation of Parliament. Will the Leader of the House therefore confirm that the Government will not support any attempts to act on the letter to the Prime Minister about comments made in a point of order in this Chamber? Will he also confirm that the House of Lords will not be threatened with abolition when dealing with article 50 legislation?

Sixty-five years ago on Monday, Her Majesty ascended the throne, and this House congratulates her on that sapphire milestone. May I ask the Leader of the House for clarification: who issues an invitation for a state visit, can the Prime Minister do it without consulting anyone and who did she consult in this case, or is this a case of frictionless negotiation—“You give me a trade deal in exchange for a state visit”? We should be told.

**Mr Lidington:** May I first associate myself wholeheartedly with the hon. Lady’s words about Her Majesty’s sapphire jubilee? At the same time, it is important for us to be conscious that the anniversary is inevitably a time for reflection, for Her Majesty in particular, as her accession was obviously made possible by the death of a much-loved father. I think everyone in the House, whatever views they have about our constitutional arrangements, will want to share in the tributes to Her Majesty for her selfless service to the United Kingdom over all those years.

The arrangements for state visits have not changed under this Government. They are exactly the same now as they were under Prime Ministers Blair and Brown.

On the subject of restoration and renewal, I am not in a position to announce a specific date, but I can tell the hon. Lady that the Government’s intention is that there should be debate in Government time before the Easter recess.

On the hon. Lady’s question about the arrangements for business, and particularly Back-Bench business on Thursday 23 February, I am conscious that I owe something of an apology to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee. It is always difficult to accommodate the various pressures on time. A date that had been planned for an Opposition half-day was lost as a result of the Supreme Court judgment and the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, which we debated earlier this week. The Government have therefore agreed that we will protect the time for the remaining Backbench Business Committee debate on Thursday 23 February. I will use my best endeavours to ensure that we reinstate as soon as possible the Backbench Business Committee time lost.

The hon. Lady asked me about trade deals. One change since the days to which she referred is that Parliament enacted the Bribery Act 2010, which has made a profound difference to the duties imposed on the directors and managers of United Kingdom companies when they do business overseas. In addition, the terms of the International Development Act 2002 mean that aid and help for the poorest in the world cannot be used to lubricate a trade deal in the way that once might have been the case.

The hon. Lady asked about the White Paper on the great repeal Bill. That is a separate and distinct White Paper and I cannot give her an exact date, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will know that there will be an appetite in the House for Members to read and digest it before we debate the repeal Bill, which will be launched early on in the next Session after the Queen’s Speech.

The hon. Lady asked about Surrey County Council and social care. She clearly missed the public statements made by the Department for Communities and Local Government yesterday. There is no secret deal. Surrey County Council has asked whether it can participate in one of the pilot projects for the proposed 100% return of business rates to local government responsibility. That is not possible in the 2017-18 financial year but, like any other local council, including hers, it is free to apply to be considered in the 2018-19 financial year. There is no memorandum of understanding. There is no secret document.

The hon. Lady asked about private Members’ Bills. The reality is that there is not and never has been under any Government an automatic right for proposed legislation to become law, including Government Bills—when Governments enjoy only a small majority, they have to think carefully about the legislation they introduce and how they ensure that they secure parliamentary support.

I take note of the strong feelings expressed in the early-day motion led by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty). Hon. Members are of course entitled to have strong opinions not just on what happens in this country, but on what happens anywhere else in the world. Like previous Governments of different political parties, whatever view any of us as individuals have of any leader of another country,

the reality is that we have to deal with other Governments in the world as they exist, particularly elected Governments who can claim a mandate from their own people. The result of the election in the United States is a matter for the people and the constitution of the United States. We should note the fact that, despite the bitterness and the hard-fought nature of the presidential election campaign, Presidents Carter, Clinton and George W. Bush, and Secretary Hillary Clinton, attended President Trump's inauguration. There was no challenge to the legitimacy of the constitutional process involved in that election.

On the House of Lords, the House of Lords has a valued function under our constitutional arrangements in terms of scrutinising and reviewing legislation from the House of Commons. I am sure they will do that on the Bill we have been debating this week, as they do on every other Bill. I am sure they will also bear in mind the reality of the referendum and the popular mandate that lies behind the article 50 decision.

Finally, the hon. Lady asked me at some length about Europe. I simply say this: her Front Bench supported the decision to have the referendum; her Front Bench supported the motion that endorsed the Prime Minister's timetable for triggering article 50 before the end of March this year; and her Front Bench last night supported the Third Reading of the unamended Bill. It is therefore a little bit rich for those on the Opposition Front Bench to be giving us lectures or posting tweets saying the "Real fight starts now" when they have been endorsing, through their voices and their votes, the approach the Government are taking.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): May we have a debate on how local councils review school catchment areas? Is the Leader of the House aware that the council in my area is seeking to tear up the current catchment areas in the Muxton ward, meaning that parents who have invested in local housing to access Burton Borough school in Newport will have to look elsewhere? It will also fundamentally change the way their children get to school. May we have an urgent debate to ensure children are not disenfranchised, either today or in the future?

**Mr Lidington:** In terms of opportunities for a debate, my hon. Friend may wish to seek an Adjournment debate through the usual procedures. These are always very difficult decisions. I think many of us know that from time to time, because of changes in population—to state the most obvious example—local authorities need to review school catchment areas. Such proposals are always subject to a period of public consultation and I am sure my hon. Friend will, as always, be extremely forceful in representing the interests of his constituents.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for the week but next. May I wish the happiest of birthdays to the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn)? I think he was my third shadow Leader of the House, but it is so hard to keep pace with the revolving door of the Labour shadow Cabinet.

It has been a thoroughly miserable, frustrating and depressing couple of weeks, which have shown this House at its absolute and utter worst. The article 50 Bill ran through Parliament at breakneck speed: no amendments accepted, very few amendments actually debated and

considered, no Report stage programmed and no Third Reading debate held. It was more like a medieval court than an advanced parliamentary democracy.

It is not as if we are overburdened with work. Why was the Bill rushed through at such a speed when we could have taken time to consider the many amendments that were tabled? That showed massive disrespect not just to this House, but to the many constituents who paid very close attention to our proceedings last week.

The Bill is now on its way to our friends down the corridor. Our unelected friends have been threatened with abolition if they dare mess with the Government's Bill and do not do their "patriotic duty", as the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union said. I am sure they are now quaking in their ermine. I offer nothing other than encouragement to these fine tribunes in ermine, who will now pick up the case. For us, it is very much a win-win whatever the outcome. I say to their lordships: reach for the barricades and take on the Government.

We need a debate about respect for the devolved Parliaments in the nations of the UK. Article 50 was not just voted on by this House this week; the Scottish Parliament also voted on it, and the overwhelming majority of Members rejected triggering it, just as every single Scottish Member of Parliament did here, bar one. Yet we have to be driven off this cliff edge with this hardest of hard Tory Brexits, even though Scotland wants absolutely nothing to do with this madness. Time is running out for Scotland's voice to be heard and our positions respected. I am sure that the Leader of the House saw this week's opinion poll putting support for independence at almost 50%, so I gently say that we have options to consider if Scotland's voice continues to be ignored.

**Mr Lidington:** I felt at times from the hon. Gentleman's paeans of praise to the House of Lords that I could visualise the ermine and the coronet descending on him—that some hidden ambition was finally shining through.

The allocation of five days for a debate on this two-clause Bill that did no more than authorise the Prime Minister to trigger article 50 seems perfectly reasonable to me. That allocation of time has allowed, even this week, about half the number of Scottish National party Members to participate in proceedings, either through speeches or interventions. Listening to some of the contributions from the SNP Benches, my impression was that the atmosphere was far from being all doom and gloom. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) entertained us royally for nearly an hour this week and seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

The reality is that the Bill has been brought forward in response to a very clear referendum decision by the electorate of the United Kingdom. It is very different from the Bills that the House debated previously to ratify various EU-amending treaties over the years.

The hon. Gentleman complains about the alleged lack of respect and attention being paid to Scotland. As the Prime Minister said yet again yesterday, the United Kingdom Government are determined to work with the Scottish Government, as well as with the Governments in Cardiff and Belfast, to ensure that the interests of

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every part of the United Kingdom are represented in the negotiations on which we are about to embark. That commitment is sincere: it is felt very strongly by the Prime Minister, and she has impressed it on every member of the Cabinet.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): Local concerns have been raised in Cambridgeshire—not least as a result of the excellent forensic work of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Stephen Barclay)—about funding decisions taken by the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough local enterprise partnership. May we have a debate in Government time to ensure that there is proper transparency and accountability of LEPs so that their decisions are fair, properly scrutinised and their efficacy is appropriately tested?

**Mr Lidington:** Members of LEPs on the whole do a good job in providing a forum for bringing local business and public authorities together and for trying to leverage private sector investment, along with public sector investment, to support such things as infrastructure projects. However, they have to pay regard to the fact that they are the custodians of public money and need to make sure that they have proper rules on accountability and transparency, as would be expected of anybody in receipt of taxpayers' money. My hon. Friend may have the opportunity to raise these issues further at Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 27 February.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on social care funding? As part of that, will he ask the Department for Communities and Local Government to publish any contact between Surrey and Ministers or aides in the Department, so that the debate can be informed? My local authority in Nottinghamshire is absolutely incandescent, as I am sure are other authorities, about the way in which, it appears, Surrey has been offered a sweetheart deal while it has been left to fend for itself.

**Mr Lidington:** As I have already made clear, there is no sweetheart deal, and Nottingham is also welcome to apply, as Surrey has indicated it wishes to do, for the full return of business rates finance to local authorities in the 2018-19 financial year. The DCLG statement yesterday gave a full account of what has happened. There has been a lot of fuss and complaint, but actually it is much less of a story than the hon. Gentleman believes.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): May we have a debate on armed forces charities? I am honoured to be president of the Huddersfield branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. If parliamentary business had been different, I would have been at Huddersfield crematorium this afternoon for the funeral of Trevor Burgin OBE. He was 92. During the second world war, he was a bomber pilot and flew many missions over Europe. He then had a successful 40-year career as a teacher. Last year, he celebrated his platinum wedding anniversary—70 years of marriage—with Kathleen. Will the Leader of the House please pass on the condolences of every Member and express our sympathy for the family and

our support for armed forces charities? Trevor was an enthusiastic and popular member of the Huddersfield branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.

**Mr Lidington:** No one in the Chamber would dissent from my hon. Friend's tribute to the late Trevor Burgin. It was particularly good that my hon. Friend talked briefly about his late constituent's career of service, because it reminds us that behind the statistics and generalities there are stories of true heroism and a lifetime of public service and commitment. We are all aware that armed forces charities do incredibly important and good work in our constituencies, often quietly and unsung, in reaching out to people still scarred by the physical and mental consequences for their health of their time in service.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Over 30 Members are seeking to catch my eye. I advise the House that 36 Members wish to speak in the first of the two Backbench Business Committee debates, and 12 wish to contribute to the second. If I am to have any chance of accommodating that later Back-Bench interest we need to be moving on by, or very close to, 12.30 pm. May we please have short questions and short answers?

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Last week, I visited the Sanger Institute, just outside Cambridge, where 1,100 people, of whom over 25% are non-UK EU nationals, are transforming our understanding of the human genome. Its senior manager has impressed upon me the gravity of the situation. Many of those people are poorly paid and would be unable to work through the tier 2 visa system. May we have a statement on this pressing skills crisis, which could damage some of the UK's most successful research institutions?

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point about his and other scientific institutions. As the Prime Minister said, the Government regard an early deal to secure the position of both EU residents already here and British nationals in other European countries as a primary objective. We want that sorted as quickly as possible.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): I very much agree with my right hon. Friend's remarks about the recent proceedings on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. Should the other place seek to delay the triggering of article 50 beyond the end of March, will he find time for a debate in Government time so that this House can discuss possibility of either the abolition or the full-scale reform of the other place?

**Mr Lidington:** I am more optimistic than my right hon. Friend. I think there is an awareness among Members of the House of Lords that, in an unelected Chamber, there are conventions that apply to the way in which they scrutinise and deal with proposed legislation. I do not want to take anything away from their proper constitutional role. I think they are very cognisant of the fact that ours is the elected House and we voted in favour of the Bill by a huge majority last night, and also of the fact that behind that vote lay the much bigger vote of the people of the United Kingdom as a whole.



**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): May we please have a debate on the legal definition of the word “normally”? Section 2 of the Scotland Act 2016 states that

it is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Scottish Parliament“.

“If the Government intend to ignore the wishes of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament over issues of such importance as the triggering of article 50, may we please find out what other important issues relating to the devolution agreement they intend to ride roughshod over?”

**Mr Lidington:** I think the ears of every lawyer in the country will have pricked up at the suggestion that we have a debate on the meaning of the word “normally”. I suspect that the interpretation of the word may depend on which lawyer’s opinion is sought.

I repeat that the Government have been absolutely consistent in saying that the interests of the entire United Kingdom, from Fair Isle to the Scillies, will be fully represented in the approach that we adopt to these negotiations.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Last month I hosted a reception to welcome a report published by Rural England, “State of Rural Services 2016”. It considers the growing impact of rural challenges on, for instance, health, education, welfare, broadband and transport. Last week I chaired a local meeting to discuss the impact of the loss of bus services. It is evident that the rural agenda is becoming increasingly difficult to deliver, and rural residents are understandably becoming ever more frustrated. Will my right hon. Friend grant a debate so that we can consider the challenges to rural funding and rural services more broadly?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend may have two bites at the cherry after the recess: Communities and Local Government questions will take place on 27 February, and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions on 2 March. I can also tell her that the Department for Communities and Local Government is currently undertaking a review of the fair funding formula to establish whether authorities throughout the country are indeed receiving their fair share of the overall cake.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Although the Department for Work and Pensions office in Cwmbran in my constituency does not face immediate closure, the jobs there will be relocated to Cardiff in the next three years. Before that happens and those jobs are lost from my local community, may we have a debate on the DWP’s strategy in relation to where it locates its offices?

**Mr Lidington:** I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman’s particular concerns about Cwmbran are relayed to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, but the principle behind these changes must be the right one. It must be right for the Department to stop paying out unnecessary rent on property that is partly empty, to use a smaller estate—particularly given the significant fall in unemployment—and to use savings partly to fund additional advice services for the people whom it is most difficult to help into work. That must be the right way of going about things.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): This weekend, following an inquiry chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), the Defence Sub-Committee will publish a report entitled “Who Guards the Guardians?” It sets out in some detail the circumstances in which a poisonous charlatan such as Phil Shiner was able to abuse our system of legal aid and the provisions of human rights legislation to hounds hundreds of British soldiers who had served bravely in Iraq and done nothing wrong. May we, at the earliest opportunity, have a statement, resulting from consultations between the Ministry of Defence, the Northern Ireland Office and the Ministry of Justice, on what legislation will be introduced to ensure that nothing like that can happen to former service personnel who served in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Lidington:** As the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, we take this issue very seriously, and I can assure my right hon. Friend that when the report is published Ministers from the Departments he has mentioned will want to study it closely and consult our hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) about the potential policy implications.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Exactly a month ago I asked the Secretary of State for Transport about the new High Speed 2 spur line running through Derbyshire, which means there will be two HS2s running through Derbyshire, not one—a fast track and a slow track. This new line is going to bring destruction and havoc to the village of Newton, which will result in the villagers losing their homes. I called upon the Secretary of State to intervene, but have never had a reply. Shall we have a statement about this matter? How far will the Government take it without responding to the people of Newton, who have suddenly realised that the second HS2 line is going to destroy their homes and their lives? Now, sort it out.

**Mr Lidington:** I know only too well the impact of the HS2 proposals on communities close to the designated route, and I undertake to the hon. Gentleman to ensure that the Secretary of State for Transport is reminded about his inquiry on this matter. It is right that the people the hon. Gentleman represents should get a proper response from HS2 Ltd, and I undertake to try to make certain that that happens.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Leader of the House will recall that last week I spoke about the mounting excitement in Cleethorpes in anticipation of a visit from the northern powerhouse Minister. He will appreciate that it is now at fever pitch, with the visit only 24 hours away, and people are talking about a parallel career path with the last Front Bencher to visit Seaview street, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). More seriously, the Seaview street traders won a Great British high street awards award. Up and down the country, traders are facing difficulties. May we have a debate to discuss the future of our high streets?

**Mr Lidington:** I cannot offer my hon. Friend a debate in Government time, but I agree that this is an important issue that affects many communities, and the growth of online sales means many small retailers face challenges.

[Mr Lidington]

It is important that retailers are able to learn from high streets that are successful and innovative in managing to keep their customers. After what my hon. Friend has said, there will probably now be a swathe of my ambitious and thrusting ministerial colleagues making a beeline for Cleethorpes at the earliest opportunity.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): May we have a statement on the shock and disappointment being felt across Scotland at the failure of former England captain David Beckham to gain a knighthood? This is particularly the case since he had been advised that his fawning support for the Better Together campaign in 2014 would

“play well with establishment and in turn help your knighthood.”

We can all associate with his sense of disappointment when he replied:

“They r a bunch of”

expletive-deletives,

“It’s a disgrace to be honest and if I was American I would of got...this 10 years ago.”

Surely the Leader of the House can bend one for Beckham?

**Mr Lidington:** I was not quite sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was speaking on behalf of Mr Beckham or whether there was some other motive there—a certain yearning for the knighthood himself. But I can honestly say to him that this is not a matter for me.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that I am keen to have another debate on international women’s day, which is forthcoming in March. Meanwhile, it is lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans history month, and given the utterly false suggestion by some Opposition Members yesterday that Brexit will mean a bonfire of lesbian, gay, transsexual and women’s rights, may we have a debate on this area around Brexit as Hampshire County Council starts to fly the rainbow flag for Hampshire Pride week?

**Mr Lidington:** I am glad that I can provide the reassurance that my hon. Friend seeks. The United Kingdom had a strong and proud tradition of human rights and liberal values before we entered the European Union, and that tradition will continue after we have left it. She has only to look at another non-EU country in Europe, Norway, to see that there is no bar to a liberal approach to individual rights as a result of being apart from the European Union.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): It is currently possible for the widowed parent of a new-born baby to receive up to £119,000 over 20 years, but if a partner dies after 6 April 2017 bereavement payments will be limited to a mere £9,800 over 18 months. May we please have a debate in Government time to discuss these Department for Work and Pensions reforms, which will cause severe hardship to grieving families?

**Mr Lidington:** There will be questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on our first day back, Monday 20 February, so the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to raise the matter on that occasion.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I do not know whether you have ever attended a speedway meeting, Mr Speaker, but that fast, exciting motor sport has always attracted a family audience. Speedway racing has taken place at Brandon in my constituency since the early days of the sport in the 1920s. Unfortunately, as a consequence of a dispute over the use of the stadium at Brandon, the Coventry Bees will start the new season this summer 25 miles away in Leicester, at great inconvenience to local fans. May we have a debate on the governance of this sport?

**Mr Lidington:** I am sure that if my hon. Friend were to draw his concerns to the attention of the Minister for Sport she would be only too delighted to see what is happening in the speedway world in the midlands. As he has suggested, however, the governance of the sport is a matter for the independent governing bodies of the sport rather than a matter in which Ministers should intervene.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before we proceed further, I can say to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), in the light of his business question, that before I came into the Chamber this morning I selected his proposed subject matter for the end-of-day Adjournment debate on the first Thursday after we return from the half-term recess, Thursday 23 February.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): May we have a statement from the Leader of the House himself—perhaps he could do it now—on how the Government bring forward Bills to this House? The fact that they did not programme a Report stage for the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill makes it quite clear that they had no intention of accepting any of the 100 amendments that were tabled by well-intentioned Members. May we have a statement on whether it was indeed the Government’s intention to ride roughshod over this parliamentary process, making the past three days a sham?

**Mr Lidington:** The programme motion was very clear that there was provision for a Report stage. Whether there would be debating time for one would, as always, depend on whether amendments had been carried and on how long the House wished to continue to debate the amendments in Committee ahead of a Report stage.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I should like to wish the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) a happy birthday. He has been an outstanding parliamentarian. I should also like to thank him for inspiring me. I was once his constituent, and his antics drove me to run for Parliament. I thank him for that. Does the Leader of the House accept that this Parliament works because we have two Houses? Sometimes the other place does not agree with us, which annoys the Government, but that is no reason whatever to threaten it with abolition. May we have a statement from the Leader of the House to confirm that?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government’s position is that we completely respect the constitutional role of the House of Lords. As I said earlier, the House of Lords itself accepts that, as an unelected House, it needs to abide by certain conventions.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): I should like to thank you, Mr Speaker, and other Members for your very kind comments; I am less happy about the fact that I must carry for life the burden of being responsible for the parliamentary career of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone).

I have a suggestion that might appeal to you, Mr Speaker, given your great record as an innovator and trailblazer in this House. May we have a debate on procedure during Divisions, to enable us to enjoy more of the singing of the Scottish National party choir? The only bright spark in the midst of yesterday evening's bleak, mean-spirited chauvinism was hearing the glorious words of the European anthem:

"Freude, schöner Götterfunken,  
Tochter aus Elysium,  
Wir betreten feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!"

And the essence of the European ideal:

"Alle Menschen werden Brüder,  
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt."

That looks forward to the great European ideal, on which this Government are now trampling, and embodies the idea that a day will come when all humanity will be one family.

**Mr Lidington:** It is rightly a Welshman who highlights the importance of singing. My advice to hon. Members on the Scottish National party Benches would be that we have an all-party parliamentary choir—for staff as well as Members—that meets in the Crypt every Monday evening. I know that SNP Members would be welcome to join those who already participate.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I am not sure how to follow that question! In the past 10 days, we have heard about Weetabix's £30 million investment, and about the expansion of the Tayto Group, all of which is good for jobs in Corby. Of course we must never be complacent, but may we have a statement next week from Ministers on the real news, rather than fake news, about the number of jobs that have been created and the investment that has taken place in the UK economy since 23 June?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The additional investment projects that have been announced in the United Kingdom since the referendum are a tribute to the underlying strength of the economy of this country, and that is a strength on which this Government are determined to build further.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I should like to speak on behalf of the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who is indisposed with a prolapsed disc; I am sure that the whole House will wish him a speedy recovery.

The Committee was placed in an invidious position at our meeting on Tuesday, and I know that the Chairman has written to the Leader of the House about this. We believed that we had been given a full day on 23 February, and we had allocated two debates for that day. We have now been left in a very difficult position. I understand that the Budget will be on 8 March, and that it will be debated on a succession of days thereafter, so even if we

fill every Thursday between now and Prorogation, we will not get all our allotted days. Furthermore, we have allocated a debate on Welsh affairs for 2 March, as close as possible to St David's day, and a debate on international women's day on a date prior to that day, which is the day of the Budget.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that we get 2 March as a Back-Bench business day, and that the protected time on 23 February will be sufficient for a proper debate on the chosen subject, which is child refugees in Greece and Italy?

I should like to make one further point, if I may. There was a terrible incident in my constituency yesterday in which a young man was stabbed at Queensbury station. The whole station was closed, inconveniencing passengers, as a result of this gang fight. May we have a statement on the action that the Government are going to take to combat knife crime, so that no other individual need suffer that terrible fate?

**Mr Lidington:** On the points about the Backbench Business Committee, as I said earlier, what has happened in regard to 23 February is regrettable and I am sorry that that decision proved necessary. I can give my hon. Friend a firm assurance that the protected time on that day will be sufficient to allow for a full debate on the subject that the Committee continues to recommend. I will do my best to ensure that the time for a further debate that has been lost is made up as rapidly as possible. I will certainly take into careful account his remarks about 2 March, because I know how important the annual St David's day debate is for Welsh Members from all political parties.

On my hon. Friend's point about his constituency case, the sense of shock that came through in his question will have been shared across the House. I will ensure that the Home Secretary is alerted to that particular case, but my hon. Friend will know that the penalties for knife crime have been increased and that the police are doing their utmost to combat the sort of gang warfare that he describes.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. To move on at 12.30 pm, I am afraid that we need one-sentence questions from now on.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Forty-one years ago, 10 Protestants were murdered by the Provisional IRA at Kingsmill. A man was subsequently charged because his palm print was found on one of the vehicles involved in the atrocity, but the Public Prosecution Service told the families this morning that that was insufficient evidence to prosecute the alleged IRA man. At the same time, soldiers are being dragged through the courts in Northern Ireland. When will we get equity of prosecutions in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Lidington:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made it clear that he is working to try to address the way in which soldiers have been unfairly singled out. The Public Prosecution Service is rightly independent of political direction, so I cannot comment on the particular case,



[Mr Lidington]

but anyone who knows anything about Northern Ireland will know that the scars of the Kingsmill massacre remain to this day.

**Mary Glindon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Residents in my constituency have been badly let down by their house builder, Bellway, which has not completed houses to standard. This week, they have been further let down because the White Paper makes no provision for a new homes ombudsman. Will the Leader of the House please raise that omission with the Housing Minister?

**Mr Lidington:** I will certainly ensure that the Minister is alerted, but I inform the hon. Lady that she will be able to raise that point again at Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 27 February.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): My constituent, Mr Christopher Bronsdon, is a victim of an anomaly in the civil service pension arrangements whereby contract and short-service employees leaving service lose the employer contributions from their pension pot. As a result, people such as Mr Bronsdon have lost £100 million in recent years, so may we have a debate on that?

**Mr Lidington:** The best advice I can give the hon. Gentleman is to apply for an Adjournment debate. If he wants to write to me with the details of the problem, I will pass them on to DWP Ministers.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I was pleased that Surrey County Council spoke out about the social care funding scandal, but if it is bad there, think how much worse it is in Hull—the third most deprived area of the country—where a £45 million shortfall in social funding is forecast by 2020. After yesterday's revelations, can all Members of Parliament outside the stockbroker belt be given the telephone number of "Nick" so that we can all text him to get the best deal that our areas need?

**Mr Lidington:** I am tempted to say that the hon. Lady had better make sure that she gets through to the right "Nick", which can sometimes prove quite tricky. Nobody is pretending that the country is not facing a serious social care challenge, which is why the Government have increased funding through the better care fund and the social care precept. In the medium term, however, we need to ensure that the best, most successful local authorities are able to disseminate their achievements among local authorities that are not performing so well and that health and social care work together more closely.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Earlier on, the International Trade Secretary told me that US investors are reluctant to invest in Scotland due to the threat of Scottish independence. Can we have a statement from the International Trade Secretary to tell us who those investors are, how much money we are talking about, what the projects are, and what the UK Government are doing to ensure that Scotland is open for business?

**Mr Lidington:** As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), the United Kingdom's track record since the referendum has been that we continue to attract investment from all around

the world. If there are particular difficulties in attracting investment into Scotland, the hon. Gentleman might look at the recently approved Scottish Government budget, for example, which has made Scots the highest-taxed people in the United Kingdom.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Mr Ali Moezzi, a prominent Iranian political prisoner, was taken to an unknown location by agents from the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence following a weekly family prison visit on 4 January. In a statement on 13 January, the British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom again warned about the threat to Mr Moezzi's life and called for international action to secure his release. Time is of the essence, so can we have an urgent statement on the matter?

**Mr Lidington:** To the hon. Gentleman's good fortune, the Minister responsible for the middle east is in his place on the Front Bench. He will have heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks and I am sure he will want to respond.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): With industrial action today at the Equality and Human Rights Commission and with its chair advising the Joint Committee on Human Rights that the EHRC is at the limits of what it can do to discharge its statutory duties, can we have a debate in Government time on the EHRC's funding so that victims of hate crime are protected?

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Gentleman may want to seek an Adjournment debate, but the EHRC rightly operates at arm's length from Ministers and has to make its own decisions about how to live within its means, just like every other public authority.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): May we have a debate in Government time to allow the House to reflect on the full import of what the Supreme Court said about the Sewel convention, so that important questions about its future application and adherence to it are not just left to contend with the other frictions and fictions of the great repeal Bill?

**Mr Lidington:** There will be questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland on Wednesday 1 March, at which there will be opportunities for that matter to be raised. I am absolutely certain that there will be ample opportunity for all such questions to be debated when we get to the EU repeal Bill after the Queen's Speech.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): Given that the Exiting the European Union Committee was told as recently as yesterday that the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU negotiations) has not even begun to consider the wording of the article 50 letter, which some reports suggest might be submitted exactly four weeks today, can we have a statement on the Committee's intended timetable?

**Mr Lidington:** Although Joint Ministerial Committee meetings are important, contact between UK Ministers and their counterparts in the three devolved Administrations, and between UK Government officials in all relevant Departments and officials in the devolved Administrations, continues on a daily and weekly basis. The consultation

and understanding of the particular priorities of the devolved Administrations are part of the mainstream work of UK Government Departments.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): At the Scottish Affairs Committee yesterday, the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) called the jobcentre closure plans “illogical”. In the Scottish Parliament, the Tories called for an equality impact assessment and greater detail. May we have a debate in Government time on the DWP’s estate closure plans and a moratorium on closures until Members across the House and people across these islands can have confidence that the Government actually know what they are doing?

**Mr Lidington:** It is a forlorn hope that the hon. Lady and members of her party might actually take some pleasure in the massive fall in unemployment and the growth in employment that we have seen in this country, including in Scotland and, indeed, in Glasgow. It cannot be right for the DWP to spend money unnecessarily on unoccupied buildings when that money could be redeployed to give additional advice and support to people with disabilities or the long-term unemployed, who want and need that additional support to get back into employment.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Yesterday, TSB announced the closure of its Cambuslang branch. In less than a year, all three banks in the town will have vanished. In the light of the announced Post Office partnership with UK banks to deliver day-to-day banking services, can we have a debate on the capacity and capability of the post office network to cope with an increase in service and custom?

**Mr Lidington:** That might well be a good subject for either a Backbench Business debate or an Adjournment debate, if the hon. Lady is fortunate in the ballot.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Not only did the Scottish Parliament vote against article 50, but it managed to deal with all its votes and amendments in less than five minutes. Yesterday, it took us two hours to deal with 10 votes. Does the Leader of the House agree that if we had electronic voting, we would have more time for debate—even if it did mean that we had less time to sing “Ode to Joy”?

**Mr Lidington:** Call me old-fashioned, but it is quite a good idea that people are present in Parliament in order to vote. If we move to electronic and remote voting, that disconnects the voting decisions from the debate itself.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): May we have an important debate on mobility payments to assist children who require

palliative care? There is an arbitrary cut-off in that children must be aged three, which I am campaigning to change. The cut-off discounts the needs of families caring for very young children in life-threatening situations.

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Lady makes an interesting point and I am not aware of the details of that particular issue. If she would like to give me some more detail, I will take it up with the appropriate Minister, and she may wish also to seek an Adjournment debate.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): May we have a statement on the Government definition of a “marriage-like relationship”? My constituent, Robert Makutsa, is under imminent threat of deportation because the Home Office does not recognise Robert’s relationship with his fiancée Chloe. That is because, as committed Christians, Robert and Chloe have not cohabited before their marriage. Can the Government consider making such a statement urgently?

**Mr Lidington:** Individual cases are, of course, subject to an independent system of appeals under our immigration and asylum rules; Ministers do not intervene in the way that the hon. Lady suggests in individual cases. Those rules provide for tests to try to distinguish between people who are living together as a matter of convenience—as sadly does sometimes happen—and those in a genuine and committed relationship, whether within marriage or without. I encourage her to write to the Immigration Minister about the particular case.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Fair Trade Fortnight is just around the corner: can we mark it with a debate on how UK trade policy affects some of the world’s poorest peoples?

**Mr Lidington:** UK support for free trade can be enormously beneficial to people living in poor countries because it means that they should be able to get readier access to customers in our country without tariffs or other regulations getting in the way. Trade and enterprise have shown themselves again and again over the decades to be the best long-term guarantee of economic growth and prosperity for people in poorer countries all around the world.

**Mr Speaker:** I have received a report from the tellers in the No Lobby yesterday for Division 157 on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill in respect of amendment 86. The number of those voting No was erroneously reported as 327 instead of 337. The Ayes were 288 and the Noes were 337.

## Points of Order

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I cannot quite believe that I am having to raise Concentrix in the House again, but after the scandal that broke around that company HMRC announced that it would never again use a private provider to deal with tax credits, especially in relation to error and fraud. But today the Government have issued a written ministerial statement saying that they will transfer tax credit error and fraud to the Department for Work and Pensions and will seek an external provider to do so. That is a disgraceful U-turn on Government policy as stated to the House. Can you do anything to ensure that a Minister comes to the House and explains why that U-turn has happened, so that they can be held properly to account?

**Mr Speaker:** Ministers are responsible for their own statements and subsequent adherence to those statements—or not, as the case may be. I do not seek to adjudicate on such matters. The short answer is that it is not for me to say that a Minister must come here today. We have scheduled business that is heavily subscribed. The hon. Lady, with her usual persistence and indefatigability, has put her concern on the record and it will have been heard on the Treasury Bench. Knowing her as I have come to do over the last 21 months, I rather doubt that she will let the matter rest. She may think about it during the recess and if she is dissatisfied with what is said, or not said, by the Government, she will doubtless return to it when we come back.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During International Trade questions earlier, the Minister repeatedly referred to a deferred Division that took place yesterday and stated on several occasions that it gave Members an opportunity to vote for or against the CETA deal. The wording of the motion on which the House divided in that deferred Division makes no reference to support for or opposition to that trade deal. I accept that the Minister was acting in good faith, but can you advise me of some way in which we can set the record straight, so that the terms on which the House divided yesterday are correctly described?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has made his own point in his own way, and it is on the record for all—including his constituents—to see. Moreover, I understand that at the end of European Committee B a vote took place on an amendment moved by the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies). The result was seven to five against the amendment, and the record shows that the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) was in the minority of five. Thereafter, the motion was passed unopposed in

Committee and subject to a deferred Division in the House yesterday. I am not sure that I can add anything further. I am not seeking to be obtuse: if I have missed the hon. Gentleman's point and he insists on having another go, I will indulge him—

**Peter Grant** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I probably should not have given the hon. Gentleman such an opportunity.

**Peter Grant:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The motion that was divided on was not actually the same motion that we were asked to consider on Monday evening. The terms of the motion as described by the Minister were different from the terms of the motion on which the House actually divided. The motion subject to the deferred Division made no reference to support for or opposition to CETA, as the Minister suggested it did on several occasions.

**Mr Speaker:** It is fair to say that the Chair is not responsible for what might be called textual exegesis. I have not looked at the text of the amendment or compared and contrasted that text with the words uttered from the Treasury Bench by the Minister this morning. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has made such a close study and may well have profited by it. I do not think there is anything further that I can do today. The hon. Gentleman is, in a sense, engaging in a debating point—perhaps a legitimate one—with the Minister and it would seem that, at least today, the hon. Gentleman has had the last word—[*Interruption.*] “Hopefully”, says someone from a sedentary position.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that the record has just had to be corrected to reflect perhaps understandable human error in the Division Lobbies last night, and given the number of intense votes we can probably expect on the great repeal Bill, does that not suggest that electronic voting might help to avoid some of those human errors? Can you tell us whose decision it would ultimately be to introduce electronic voting in this House?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer to the hon. Gentleman, who never misses an opportunity, is that it would be a decision for the House. Let me be clear about that. A change could be agreed only by the House, and equally it could decide not to agree to such a change. I think we will leave it there for today.

If there are no further points of order and the appetite, at least for today, has been satisfied, we come to the Back-Bench motion on Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. I warn colleagues that it is almost inevitable that we will have a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, because some 35 colleagues wish to contribute.



## Backbench Business

### Occupied Palestinian Territories: Israeli Settlements

12.38 pm

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House reaffirms its support for the negotiation of a lasting peace between two sovereign states of Israel and Palestine, both of which must be viable and contiguous within secure and internationally recognised borders; calls on the Government to take an active role in facilitating a resumption of international talks to achieve this; welcomes UN Security Council Resolution 2334 adopted on 23 December 2016; and further calls on the government of Israel immediately to halt the planning and construction of residential settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which is both contrary to international law and undermines the prospects for the contiguity and viability of the state of Palestine.

Given the investment that we have made in a two-state solution, my question to the Minister is: aside from standing on the touchlines watching the players on the field and shouting advice, what more can we do while our friend and ally pursues a policy on settlements that is bound, so proceeding, to deliver a situation in which the two-state solution becomes geographically and economically unworkable? Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) rightly challenged the Prime Minister about the need for face-to-face negotiations. He is a champion of the case for greater investment in strategies and projects to bring about the integration of Palestinian and Israeli citizens, and he is right about that, too.

Our Department for International Development employees in Jerusalem, who travel into the city daily on a tortuous commute from the areas around Bethlehem, are young people in their mid-20s to mid-30s. The only interaction that they ever have with an Israeli subject is when, during that journey, they are challenged to show their papers under the operation of what I would call the pass laws that exist to ensure that people's ability to live, stay and work in their own city is restricted.

I entirely understand how we got to that dreadful situation: because of the obscenity of suicide bombing. Israel—no Government—could not possibly tolerate the wholesale slaughter of its innocent citizens. The key question for us is, having got to this dreadful situation, how we get back from it. It is one thing to demand, quite properly, face-to-face negotiations, but pursuing a policy in respect of illegal settlements makes those negotiations much more difficult, particularly when that policy is driven by an increasingly strident ideology.

**Mr John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Desmond Swayne**: I will give way when I have developed my argument.

On Monday night, when a Bill was passed in the Knesset retrospectively legalising 4,000 homes in illegal settlements, the Israeli Minister of Culture welcomed the result, saying that it was

“the first step towards complete...Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria.”

The words “Judea and Samaria” were chosen carefully.

When President Trump was elected, the Israeli Interior Minister, no less, welcomed it by saying that we are witnessing

“the birth pangs of the Messiah when everything has been flipped to the good of the Jewish people”.

On Monday, Mr Speaker put a rather different gloss on Mr Trump's election but, nevertheless, it is absolutely clear that a significant proportion of the Israeli political establishment is in thrall to an increasingly strident settler movement that regards Palestine as a biblical theme park—Judea and Samaria.

The more strident and aggressive outriders of the settler movement are not people we would necessarily welcome as our neighbours. I particularly refer to what is now happening in Hebron. Setting aside some of the ruses that are used to acquire property, when the settlers move in, it is actually their Palestinian neighbours who have to erect grilles and meshes over their windows, and fences around their yards, to exclude projectiles and refuse. The reaction of the security forces to protect their newly resident citizens is to impose an exclusion zone, and to cordon off and sanitise the access and areas around those properties. So proceeding, Palestinians find that they are excluded from the heart of their city and, indeed, from the environs of their own homes. It has all the appearance of what we used to describe as petty apartheid.

Secretary Kerry explained at the turn of the year why the United States would no longer pursue its policy of exercising its veto in respect of UN Security Council resolution 2334. He said that if the two-state solution were abandoned, Israel could no longer be both a democracy and a Jewish state because, as a consequence of abandoning the policy, it would have to accommodate Palestinian citizens and all their civil and political rights within the state of Israel.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): But did not John Kerry also say that

“this is not to say that the settlements are the whole or even primary cause of the conflict—of course they are not. Nor can you say that if they were removed you would have peace without a broader agreement—you would not”?

That was what he said. The right hon. Gentleman could have tabled a more balanced motion that reflects—look, he is sneering—all the barriers to a two-state solution, which is what I want to see.

**Sir Desmond Swayne**: I certainly was not sneering. I entirely accept that that was what John Kerry said—I do not dispute it for one moment. Frankly, the motion could not be more anodyne.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con) *rose*—

**William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): Is now not the time, more than ever, for the United Kingdom Government to be entirely consistent and to remind the world, without any qualification, that settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are illegal?

**Sir Desmond Swayne**: I absolutely agree. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) still wish to intervene?

**Richard Graham:** In a moment.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Very well. I shall return to my point about John Kerry. The key question is the one I put to the Minister at the start of my speech: what can we do? I was delighted by the activism of the United Kingdom Government on UN Security Council resolution 2334.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Not yet.

I was, of course, dismayed by the subsequent inactivity of Her Majesty's Government in respect of the Paris conference. That comes back to the question of what we do every time there is some outrageous announcement on settlements.

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

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I will not give way.

What we do—I have heard the Minister say this from the Dispatch Box—is we make representations at the highest level. I have also said that at the Dispatch Box, and of course we do make those representations. I am certain that the Prime Minister will have made representations to the Prime Minister of Israel on Monday. I last made representations to an Israeli politician at a meeting in the Knesset with the chief negotiator with the Palestinians and Deputy Prime Minister. Halfway through that meeting, he stormed out announcing that I had launched a brutal assault—moi! As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am a pussy in comparison with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is a terrier. I am absolutely convinced that his representations will be much more robust than mine but, so long as they remain representations, the Government of Israel will continue to act with absolute impunity.

The question to the Minister is: what do we do beyond representations? What else exists in his armoury to escalate the situation? I accept that that is an extraordinarily difficult question because Israel is our friend and ally. It is a democracy, and a nation in which we have huge commercial interests and with which we share vital intelligence agendas.

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

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** I am afraid that my hon. Friend has missed his opportunity.

As I conclude, may I make one gentle suggestion to my hon. Friend the Minister? He might consider giving effect to this House's instruction that we should recognise the Palestinian state. I have heard him say that we can do that only once, and that therefore we need to choose the moment at which that will have the maximum impact. I agree with him, but he needs to consider this: it would be truly absurd if we were to delay that recognition till after the point at which the reality of any such Palestinian state could actually be delivered.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I suggest to Members that we will have to start with a five-minute time limit on speeches. If we can try to be tight, we will get everyone in, hopefully with the same amount of time.

12.50 pm

**Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling this debate and congratulate the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) on the way he introduced it.

Debates such as this always bring out sharply differing opinions on both sides of the Chamber—that is inevitable—but in my experience there is one thing on which there has always been consensus in the House, whatever people's views on other issues: the best way to peace between Israel and Palestine is a two-state solution in which both peoples have equal rights to sovereignty in viable and contiguous states. Of course full and lasting peace involves more than dealing with settlements, but settlements are rightly the focus of this debate because their continued expansion, the infrastructure around them, and the demolitions that precede them, are creating, as the right hon. Gentleman said, a new physical reality in the west bank that is destroying the possibility of a viable Palestinian state ever being established. They are making physical changes to the map of the west bank, carving it up into different segments, severed from each other, so that it ends up resembling a Swiss cheese. It does not resemble anything that could, at the end of the day, be a viable and contiguous Palestinian state.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the policy of ongoing settlement expansion is not only an intolerable infringement on the rights of the Palestinians, but a long-term threat to the stability and security of Israel? People who care about Israel's longer-term security, and its future as a democratic and Jewish state, ought to oppose that policy and support the progressive voices in Israel that are also opposed to settlement expansion.

**Richard Burden:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am particularly pleased that he mentions the progressive voices in Israel, because they do exist. Among the most insidious things currently happening are the actions taken by some of the Israeli right, sadly supported by people in the Israeli Government, to silence the voices of organisations such as B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence and many others that have the guts and integrity to stand up and say, "This is wrong."

Some 6,000 new units have been announced in just the past few weeks and the settlement footprints now make up more than 42% of the west bank's land mass. Whatever the numbers, the reality is, as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) said, that every single settlement built on occupied land is unlawful under the fourth Geneva convention.

If settlement building does not stop, the destruction of the two-state solution that will inevitably follow will mean the de facto annexation of the west bank by Israel. In the past week, we have seen another move towards that, with the passing of the so-called regularisation law, which retrospectively declares legal the illegal Israel

settlements on expropriated private Palestinian land. I commend Israel's Attorney General for declaring that unconstitutional and pay tribute to the judicial independence that demonstrated, but the direction of travel is clear: both that law and the massive expansion of settlements that is taking place mean that, whatever Israel calls it in theory, annexation is happening in practice.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's long record of work on this issue. In his view, are we now beyond the point at which a viable Palestinian state could be set up, were there the agreement to do that, or are there perhaps still grounds for some optimism?

**Richard Burden:** It is right that the long-standing policy of this House and of Britain to support the two-state solution endures, but let us make no mistake: the chances of that solution are disappearing.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Burden:** I am afraid I cannot give way any more as there is not enough time. I am sure the hon. Lady will have her chance to speak a little later.

What John Kerry was getting at was that if we end up with the de facto annexation of the west bank, that gives Israel a choice. It can say either that everybody living there should have the vote and rights equal to those of its own citizens, or that they do not. If it says that they do have those rights, the future of Israel with a Jewish majority is at an end. If it says that they do not have those rights, Israel can no longer claim to be a democracy. Not only that, but if there is de facto annexation while Israel maintains a system of laws and controls that discriminate against the majority of people who live in the west bank and denies them basic democratic rights, what term can we use to decide what we are left with but a form of apartheid?

If one goes and looks at the reality of life for Palestinians on the west bank, it is difficult not to come away with the impression that what is happening there is already a creeping culture of apartheid. Is it any wonder, then, that if one talks to Palestinians today—particularly young Palestinians who have never experienced anything other than the grinding weight of occupation—they increasingly say that they see the international community's constant going on about a two-state solution as a cruel deception for them and their lives? They say, "Actually, we are now getting to the stage where we don't care how many states there are. We just want it ensured that we have equal rights with everybody else."

We are left with choices about what we do about this situation, and the right hon. Member for New Forest West was right to put this to the Minister. We can either continue with the mantra that we support a two-state solution in theory, or we can do something to save that solution. I have two questions for the Minister. First, what actions—not simply words—are the UK Government prepared to take to differentiate settlements in the occupied west bank from Israel itself? Secondly, as settlements are illegal, should not there be a clear message from the Government that any trade preferences, either before or after Brexit, do not apply to settlements, and that this

will be enforced? UK businesses should not collude with illegality through any financial dealings with settlements or through the import of settlement goods to the UK.

I conclude by echoing a point made by the right hon. Gentleman. Five years ago, William Hague, the then Foreign Secretary, said:

"We reserve the right to recognise a Palestinian state bilaterally at a moment of our choosing and when it can best help to bring about peace."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2011; Vol. 535, c. 290.]

In October 2014, this House asked the Government to act on that, so does the Minister agree that, with the two-state solution that we all support under threat like never before, now is the time to act on that bilateral recognition? We have to ask ourselves: if not now, when; and if not now, are not those Palestinians who believe that we talk a good story but do nothing to end their misery actually right?

12.58 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on introducing the debate.

Secretary Kerry's speech after the adoption of resolution 2334 was outstanding in its depth and balance. Friends of both Israel and Palestine must address his central charge that the status quo is unsustainable and is both a threat to a democratic Israel and prevents a viable Palestinian state. The argument that resolution 2334, John Kerry's speech, the Paris conference and even this motion are hollow words and simply serve to harden intransigence is transparent, self-serving nonsense. Reiterating basic tenets of international law and ceaselessly searching for peace should not be dismissed in that way.

I share Kerry's analysis that settlements are not the "the whole or even the primary cause of this conflict."

I welcome his work on securing Palestinian acknowledgement that the reference in the Arab peace initiative to the 1967 lines included the concept of land swaps, and he is right that even if the settlements were removed, we would not have peace without a broader agreement.

Since Oslo, Palestinians have been betrayed by two decades of factionalised leadership; by the international community in the disastrous consequences of the implementation of the Oslo process; historically, by their Arab neighbours in the catastrophic way that they first advanced their own interests ahead of the Palestinian cause; and, also historically, by Britain in our failure to deliver the second half of the Balfour declaration.

It is also true that, for more than 100 years, the Palestinian leadership has never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Today, those encouraging violence are again betraying the opportunity to present the Palestinian cause with the legal and moral authority that it deserves. However, while admitting the enormity of these issues, one should not belittle the seriousness of the settlements issue. Settlements are illegal under international law for a reason.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am very grateful to the distinguished Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee for allowing me to intervene. Will he comment



[Ian Murray]

on what message it sends out to the international community when UN resolution after UN resolution on settlements is ignored and on what we can do to ensure that we action the one that has just been passed?

**Crispin Blunt:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who is such a distinguished addition to the Foreign Affairs Committee. As he knows, we have announced an inquiry into British policy towards the middle east peace process, and it is an issue with which we will engage in detail over the months ahead.

**Dr Whitford:** Having been in Gaza a quarter of a century ago when the Oslo process started, I have to ask whether we are not now in a situation in which, if we do not recognise and enforce international law, we send out the message to other countries in the world that if they cover something in concrete, we will let them get away with it. If that is so, we will pay the price.

**Crispin Blunt:** I agree with the hon. Lady. The implications of these settlements are catastrophic. One should not belittle the seriousness of the issue. As I was saying, settlements are illegal under international law for a reason. One cannot conquer someone else's territory and then colonise it. The end of that era was codified in the Geneva convention in 1949, and our experience since has been of decolonisation. That it should have happened over the past 50 years at the hands of a nation born out of the moral authority of the appalling treatment of the Jews in Europe over centuries that culminated in the holocaust is deeply troubling for the admirers of the heroic generation that founded the state of Israel.

We rightly talk about all that should be celebrated in Israel, which is often described as a beacon of our shared values in a troubled region, but the truth is that Palestinians, the Arab world and the wider international community, including our own population, increasingly see Israel through the clouded prism of the settlements.

Within Israel, there is no consensus on settlements. The recent regularisation law has raised a particularly rancorous debate. It was Benny Begin, the son of a former Prime Minister and a Likud Member of the Knesset, who dubbed the law as the "robbery law", while the head of the Zionist Union, Isaac Herzog, called it "a threat" to Israel. It is worth remembering that Parliaments cannot make legal what international law proscribes.

**Richard Graham:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the expansion of illegal settlements is to the despair of many people who wish Israel well and plays precisely into the hands of those who believe that there is a cynical intent never to pursue a two-state solution?

**Crispin Blunt:** I wholly agree with my hon. Friend.

It distresses me that, despite the formal reiteration of the British position on settlements, the recent signals from the Government—briefing against the Kerry speech, not participating in the Paris conference and receiving an Israeli Premier who has just presided over the regularisation law and who is in deep domestic trouble—suggest that they do not fully appreciate the seriousness

of this obstacle to peace and the threat to the values of a nation that our history of personal, economic and security relationships makes a firm friend and ally. Friends should not allow each other to make profound and damaging mistakes, which is why I support this motion.

1.4 pm

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): Before addressing the motion, I wish to condemn the rocket attack on Israel last night when Islamic State fired four rockets from the Sinai peninsula into Eilat. I expect that the whole House wants to join me in that sentiment.

Three weeks ago, I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill in support of an international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace. At the outset, I made it clear that I opposed continued settlement building in the west bank, a policy that threatens the viability of a future Palestinian state, the case for which is unarguable. It does immense damage to Israel's standing in the world, and, over time, it will put at risk that which is most precious about Israel's character—its Jewish and democratic character.

I also made it clear that settlements are not the only or even the principal obstacle to peace. As the former US Secretary of State, John Kerry, who has been much quoted today, said in his final speech on the middle east in December,

"The core issues can be resolved if there is leadership on both sides committed to finding a solution. In the end, I believe the negotiations did not fail because the gaps were too wide, but because the level of trust was too low."

Settlement building in the west bank does nothing to contribute to raising those levels of trust—in fact, it does quite the reverse—but let us be clear: trust has to be built and earned by both sides. It is unfortunate that today's motion makes scant recognition of that fact. Therefore, let me outline some of the factors, beyond settlement building, that contribute to that lack of trust.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Last month, I had the privilege of being on a delegation to Israel and Palestine. We met a group of young Palestinians and young Israelis on the MEET project—Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow—who are working together on IT and technology. That is surely the way to build the trust that my right hon. Friend talks about.

**Joan Ryan:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I, too, have visited that project, and it is inspiring. Co-existence is building trust.

I do not believe that trust is built when the Palestinian Authority pumps out an unrelenting stream of anti-Semitic incitement—children's programmes that teach their young audience to hate Jews; the naming of schools, sports tournaments and streets after so-called martyrs; and the payment of salaries to convicted terrorists—when it is suggested, as Palestinian state media regularly does, that all of Israel is occupied territory; or when the authority continues to insist on a right to return for the descendants of Palestinian refugees to pre-1967 Israeli territory.

**Richard Graham** *rose*—

**Joan Ryan:** I will not give way just now.

I do not believe that trust has been built by the experience of Gaza—territory that Israel unilaterally withdrew from 12 years ago only to see it come under the control of Hamas, which is committed to the creation of a Palestinian Islamist state from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): The right hon. Lady has been talking about trust, but how would she assess the fact that when some 8,000 settlers were evacuated from Gaza, they were greeted by almost 20,000 rockets?

**Joan Ryan:** We all know that being greeted by that number of rockets will do anything but build trust. Hamas uses Gaza as a base indiscriminately to fire rockets into Israeli villages, towns and cities, which the hon. Gentleman was referring to, and build tunnels to carry out terrorist attacks.

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Joan Ryan:** Not at the moment, no. Hamas's treatment of women, its political opponents, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and journalists shows absolutely no respect for the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. Trust is not built when those international institutions, which might be expected to help foster a settlement and promote the values of peace and reconciliation, show that they cannot act as honest brokers.

The UN General Assembly ended its 2016 annual legislative session with 20 resolutions against Israel and only six on the rest of the world combined; there were three on Syria, one each on Iran, North Korea and Crimea, and 20 on Israel. There is no balance there. The UN Human Rights Council adopted 135 resolutions in its first decade of existence, 68 of which—more than half—attacked Israel. UNESCO has denied the Jewish people's deep historical connection with Judaism's holiest sites in Jerusalem.

As supporters of a two-state solution, we should commit to building trust with and between Israelis and Palestinians in our words and actions. In our words, we should avoid emotive language that feeds a narrative of victim and villain, recognise and encourage the need for compromise and never fail to acknowledge the complexities of a conflict that has endured for decades, the roots of which run deep. In our actions, we should steer clear of simplistic solutions such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, which, by seeking to delegitimise and demonise the world's only Jewish state, is morally wrong and does nothing to follow the cause it claims to support. We should give no encouragement to those who deny Israel's right to exist and refuse to renounce violence. Hamas and Hezbollah are no friends to the cause of a two-state solution.

We should do all we can to assist those in Israel and Palestine who are working for peace and reconciliation. That is why the greatest contribution Britain can make towards building strong constituencies for peace in Israel and Palestine is to increase our support for co-existence work—people-to-people projects that bring together Israelis and Palestinians at the grassroots level—and to back the establishment of an international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace. The absence of such constituencies

is all too apparent. Although 59% of Israelis and 51% of Palestinians still support a two-state solution, those already slim majorities are fragile and threatened by fear and distrust between the two peoples. After two decades, a significant body of evidence now indicates the impact that co-existence projects can have, despite the challenging environment in which they exist. Those participating in such programmes report higher levels of trust and co-operation, more conflict resolution values and less aggression and loneliness. Those are the kinds of measures we should support. I call on the Government to support the international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

1.12 pm

**Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I had no doubt that today would be an impassioned debate, and we have got off to a good start, hearing quite clear views from both sides of the issue.

As other hon. Members have mentioned, Israeli settlements are not the main obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians by a long stretch. A No. 10 spokesman said in December that settlements are

"far from the only problem in this conflict...the people of Israel deserve to live free from the threat of terrorism, with which they have had to cope for too long".

The narrative seems to be that the conflict we see today started in 1967, when Israel gained control of the west bank and Gaza, but I ask hon. Members to consider why violence in the region pre-dates the existence of the settlements? It is worth recalling that the west bank and Gaza were occupied before 1967 not by Israel, but by Jordan and Egypt respectively. During those occupations, they refused to grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees, nor did they surrender the territory to be used for a Palestinian state. Where is the condemnation of Jordan and Egypt? The international outcry was deferred until Israel occupied the disputed lands, at which point it became unacceptable for an occupation to take place. From that point onwards, it was unacceptable; before that, no condemnation.

Legality is not subjective. It is often said that Israeli settlements are illegal, but stating that repeatedly does not make it true—[*Interruption.*] I would like to reply to any inflammatory comments, but I ask hon. Members to bear with me for a moment. The west bank and Gaza remain, as they have always been, disputed territories under international law. There has never been a Palestinian state, so the territory remains ownerless. That is a strong argument for some, although it is not one to which I necessarily subscribe.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It sounds like it.

**Mike Freer:** The whole point of the Chamber—for those chuntering from a sedentary position—is to expose and discuss those arguments, not to merely rehearse entrenched positions. What, otherwise, is the point of a debate?

**Ian Austin:** The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. The truth is that a Palestinian state was proposed in 1947, but it was not established by other Arab countries, which chose instead to invade Israel at the moment of its establishment. A Palestinian state could have been

[*Ian Austin*]

established at any point in the following 20 years by Egypt, which controlled Gaza at the time, or by Jordan, which controlled the west bank. He is completely right to make that point.

**Mike Freer:** I am grateful for that intervention. Of course, the debate is one-sided. People criticise Israel for demolishing tunnels, building walls and raising buildings, but they make no comment when Egypt does exactly the same. The international community is silent on Egypt, and only vocal on Israel. As the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) said, where is the balance? I said that some people believe that the settlements are not illegal because the land is ownerless. I do not subscribe to that view, but it is important to mention because people hold that view very firmly and the issue is divisive.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Freer:** Would the hon. Gentleman give me a moment? As the right hon. Member for Enfield North said, this is a fundamental issue of building trust. Unless trust is built and the issue of disputed lands is dealt with, the trust deficit will continue.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as far as Israel was concerned, the trust was almost ended when the only result of removing all settlements from Gaza was a torrent—an avalanche—of rockets and missiles?

**Mike Freer:** My hon. and long-time Friend makes a good point. Everyone talks about Israel giving up land for peace. It has given land, but it did not get the peace.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Freer:** Sorry, but I have taken two interventions and time is running short.

I wholeheartedly support and hope for a two-state solution that can be established with trust on both sides, but only two parties can decide on borders and other final status issues, and those two parties are Israel and the Palestinians. Accordingly, I welcome the Prime Minister's reiteration yesterday that direct peace talks remain the best way to secure a solution—direct talks between the two parties involved, not European conferences excluding one of the parties. As I have said before, the two-state solution we all support should be the end, not the start, of the process. I strongly believe that such debates need to focus on the whole and complex picture and should not be imbalanced by focusing on one particular aspect.

Likewise, UN Security Council resolution 2334 does not help to advance peace, as it focuses on Israeli settlements and only serves to reward Palestinian intransigence and unilateralism. Of particular concern to my constituents is that, for the first time, resolution 2334 defines East Jerusalem as

“Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967”,

including the Western Wall and Temple Mount, which are Judaism's holiest sites. The area also includes the holy sites of Christianity, where Jesus practised his ministry. The definition implies that Jews and Christians visiting their holiest sites are acting illegally, and that is an affront to Christians and Jews alike—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members are chuntering from a sedentary position.

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

**Mike Freer:** No, I will not. I have given way twice. I am trying to reflect the concerns of my constituents. Hon. Members may not like those views, but it is my job to represent my constituents in an imbalanced debate, whether other hon. Members like it or not. That is the purpose of a constituency MP, and that is what I seek to do.

**Joanna Cherry:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Freer:** No. I have already given way twice.

As I said, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) said, Israel has given up land for peace, but it has not had the peace, and it is important that this Government continue to support, nudge and cajole our ally to take the right course. However, a premature declaration of statehood by the Palestinians, acting unilaterally, would put back peace, not pursue it. If we support the Balfour declaration, we must stand alongside our ally, Israel, and make that declaration work.

1.20 pm

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I must say that I do believe the point that has been made: the best way to resolve this apparently intractable problem is the same way as peace processes around the world have resolved problems—through face-to-face negotiations between people on the ground, and not through grandiose schemes that play to certain galleries and certain outside influences. That is an important starting point for any peace process ultimately to work.

**Ian Austin:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Paisley:** I will not at the moment.

Settlements are a symptom of the conflict in Israel; they are not the cause. If anyone thinks they are the cause of the conflict, they do not understand what has happened in that land. History shows that the unilateral removal and evacuation of settlements did not generate peace at all, but inspired more rocket attacks and the deaths of more innocents in other settlements—that is what it actually did. Instead of being part of a peace process, the unilateral removal of settlements would be a piece-by-piece process—a step-by-step process towards more attacks on innocent people. So let us stop the hand-wringing and the pretence that a unilateral move on settlements will make peace—it will not. For some—not in this Chamber—it is a cover for more aggression, and for most it reflects a misguided view of what is happening on the ground. You cannot negotiate away settlements in advance.

**Mrs Ellman:** I support the point the hon. Gentleman is making. Would he like to contrast the failure of Israel's unilateral decision to remove settlements and to withdraw from Gaza to secure peace with the agreement



that was made with Egypt in 1979, when Israel withdrew and demolished its settlements as part of an agreement that has lasted until this day?

**Ian Paisley:** The hon. Lady, who has much experience and knowledge of the area, makes a vital point. If we look at the history of the area, we see that Israel has a very good track record of agreeing concessions on territory whenever peace is made. That was the history in 1979 between Sadat and Begin. When they made an agreement, what did Israel do? It gave up critical Sinai—91% of the territory it won in 1967—once peace was agreed. As part of that peace, Begin completely destroyed the Yamit settlement in Sinai. With Jordan, what was the attitude of the Israelis? When they got a settlement, both sides redeployed to their respective sides and agreed to the international boundaries.

The point made by the hon. Lady is supported by facts on the ground at the end of a peace process. I have been part of a peace process, and you cannot make a major concession at the beginning of a peace process and think that it starts at that point; you make the concessions at the end, on the basis of an agreement. That is what needs to take place.

**Rushanara Ali:** Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he agrees that Israeli settlements are illegal? While that is not the only factor, it is critical that we address and acknowledge it. Secondly, in relation to Gaza, 800,000 children are living in what the former Prime Minister described as one of the world's biggest open prisons. These are major humanitarian issues, which we need to confront and address.

**Ian Paisley:** To be absolutely clear, I am not dismissing any of the major humanitarian issues. I have absolute sympathy, concern and passion for the needs of Israeli and Palestinian children, men and women. I hope that they can live in new, harmonious, peaceful countries, but we have to get to the point of understanding how we get to that solution. The terms of reference for any negotiation should be the starting point that we want to get to a peaceful, secure Israel side by side with a sovereign Palestine. That is how we have to try to get a two-state solution, and the only way we will achieve that is through face-to-face negotiations between the practitioners on the ground.

Most Members will have had the opportunity in the last day or so to see the Women's International Zionist Organisation project on Upper Committee corridor. Women of different races, creeds and backgrounds from across Israel and Palestine were asked to do one thing: to paint an olive tree. All those different women have given very different perspectives, but they have painted the same thing in all its glory. The important point about that experiment is that if we put people together on the ground and allow them to negotiate and do something face to face, they will ultimately get to a solution.

The message we should send out today is clear and unequivocal: only Israelis and Palestinians, sitting down together face to face, can sort this out and achieve peace in a much tortured and embattled region.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am sorry, but owing to the number of interventions we are going to have to go down to four minutes already.

1.26 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): I would like to give credit to everybody who has spoken—every speech has added to the debate. I am very grateful that there was cross-party support for bringing the debate forward.

So far, I do not think we have been straitjacketed by polarised views. If someone criticises Palestine, it does not mean they are an apologist for the occupation. If someone criticises Israeli policies, it does not mean they are against Israel or anti-Semitic. I deplore Hamas's support for terrorism, and I deplore the building of settlements and outposts beyond the green line.

Our monitors say that the motion is "Occupied Palestinian Territories: Israeli Settlements". That does not do credit to the full motion, which talks about the two-state solution and asks our Government to take a more active role. This is a very important debate, especially in this year of sad anniversaries—anniversaries of occupation, anniversaries of a blockade and, vitally for us and for our Government today, the centenary of the Balfour declaration. The declaration did commend the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, it also uses the words:

"it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine".

That is where our role is critical.

It is correct that the settlements are illegal. I know there is some dispute in Israel about the Geneva convention, but the International Court of Justice, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Security Council claim that the settlements are illegal. President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry—he said this in December—and even Ronald Reagan also claimed the settlements are illegal.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a good speech. Does she agree that the Government are to be congratulated on supporting resolution 2334? Will she, like me, be looking to the Minister to say what action the Government are planning to take to enforce resolution 2334?

**Dr Mathias:** I appreciate the hon. Lady's intervention. That is the problem with so many resolutions—2336, 242 and 181. Yes, I would look to the Minister to tell us what actions the Government are planning to take.

Worryingly, the number of settlements has increased to over 100, as has the number of outposts, to over 100. They are increasing in number, in population, and in geographical area. A matter of concern for anybody who has seen images of them are the settlements in the area just by Jerusalem, the so-called E1 area, which may split the Palestinian west bank north and south. Gaza and the west bank have been separate since 1947, yet this year there is the danger of even more fragmentation.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the regularisation law passed by the Israeli Government last Monday makes a two-state solution even more difficult, because settlements that previously were illegal are now legal under Israeli law?

**Dr Mathias:** I absolutely agree. That is why this debate is crucial.

I completely agree with other Members who have talked about trust and communities coming together. Many Israelis and many Palestinians have wonderful projects, and I have witnessed many of them.

There is a problem where settlements and outposts are on private Palestinian land. I have been in the region during a period of conflict and witnessed many events, but the only time I saw an Uzi being fired at a school was by a settler, not by any person in military uniform.

This year is critical. Our Government have failed on part of the Balfour declaration. I am keen to hear what the Minister says in reply to hon. Members who have said, yes, now is the time to recognise a Palestinian state, but also, even if all the settlements and outposts were dismantled today, there would not be peace, because the negotiations have to proceed about matters such as borders, Jerusalem, the refugees' right to return, and Israeli bases.

1.32 pm

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): I oppose anything that stands in the way of the creation of the two-state solution that I have believed in and campaigned for all my life. It is wrong, however, to suggest, as I believe this motion does, that the settlements are the only barrier, or even the biggest barrier, to the peace process. We have to look at the actions of the Palestinian Authority, too: the denial of Israel's right to exist; the depiction of all of modern Israel as part of Palestine; the incitement to, and glorification of, violence by its media, senior officials and Ministry of Education.

**Joan Ryan:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is really important that we distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israel and de-legitimisation of Israel that questions its very right to exist?

**Ian Austin:** That is completely right. That is why the Palestinian Authority's denial of Israel's right to exist will not build the trust that we have discussed here this afternoon. Nor will the incentivising of terrorism through the payment of salaries to convicted terrorists.

**Dr Philippa Whitford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Austin:** Not at the moment.

Does anyone seriously believe that the settlements are a bigger barrier to the peace process than Hamas's terrorism and extremism? Its charter sets out its goals with an explicit rejection of not just Israel's right to exist, but the very idea of a peace process, which it says would involve the surrender of "Islamic land". This is an organisation that spends millions, and uses building materials, which could build hospitals, schools and homes, for tunnels and terror. It pioneered suicide bombing in the middle east, and then celebrated the murder of Israelis in bars and restaurants.

**Crispin Blunt:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Austin:** Not at the moment.

Settlements do not, as has been suggested in the debate, make the prospect of a two-state solution impossible. I do not defend settlement-building, but the House

should recognise that Israel has shown its willingness to evacuate settlements before—from Sinai in 1982, as part of the Camp David accords, and when it unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005.

**John Howell:** Will the hon. Gentleman congratulate Israel, because only last month it removed 50 families from land at Amona?

**Ian Austin:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right to raise that important point. I am pleased that it has been raised because it has not been discussed or mentioned by anyone who has spoken so far.

It is important for the House to recognise that 75% of the settlers are on 6.3% of the land, so when people talk about the west bank being concreted over, they are factually wrong—it is not true.

**Dr Paul Monaghan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP) *rose*—

**Ian Austin:** I will not give way any more—I have given way twice.

This issue can be dealt with through land swaps. That was accepted as a principle for building a peace process in all recent negotiations. In 2008, Ehud Olmert outlined a plan under which this could have been achieved.

I say all this because I want to argue that with compromise, creativity and concessions on both sides, the rights of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to self-determination and to peace can be secured. There are considerable further challenges facing a two-state solution, such as the status of Jerusalem, security, and refugees. However, it is also important to recognise, as has not been sufficiently recognised in this debate so far, that majorities on both sides still favour a two-state solution. None of these issues is insurmountable if there is a willingness on both sides to negotiate, to compromise, and to make concessions.

The solution is not one-sided, simplistic motions and calls for grand international gestures unilaterally imposed on the peoples of Israel and Palestine. In fact, grand gestures are counter-productive to the cause of peace because they suggest to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority that there is a route to a Palestinian state that can be imposed from outside that does not involve face-to-face direct talks and negotiations, which is the only way this issue is going to be solved. The truth is that there is no alternative that will end the bloodshed.

**Richard Graham** *rose*—

**Ian Austin:** I have given way twice.

We should be doing everything we can to develop dialogue, to promote direct negotiations between the two sides, and to build trust instead of boycotts, sanctions and other measures that just drive people further and further apart. I want Britain to support organisations like the one we heard about earlier, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and I visited recently in Jerusalem, that bring Israelis and Palestinians together to work to build the foundations for two viable states living peacefully alongside each other. It would have been really good if more Members had been in the Strangers Dining Room yesterday to hear about the WIZO project and what women—Jewish,

Muslim and Christian women—in Israel and in Palestine are doing to work together to create the building blocks for peace. I want Britain to be doing more to promote economic development, trade and investment on the west bank, encouraging brilliant projects like one that I have been to see—the new Palestinian city of Rawabi on the west bank. I want to see Britain pushing internationally for the demilitarisation and reconstruction of Gaza.

Peace talks have produced results in the past, they have come close to a breakthrough on several occasions since, and they will have to do so again, because the only way this conflict will be resolved is by people on both sides negotiating, compromising, and working together towards the two-state solution.

1.38 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) because, like him and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), I have been fully involved in visits to Israel and the west bank—six over the past three years—with organisations that encourage co-operation between Israelis and Palestinians. I also chair events here where those organisations come forward and describe what they are doing. I have on several occasions been to Tel Aviv to see Save a Child's Heart, a brilliant organisation that goes out of its way to treat Palestinian children who have heart problems. That involves fine surgery that requires a great deal of skill.

**Bob Blackman:** My hon. Friend mentioned Save a Child's Heart. Will he confirm that children from other Arab countries and beyond receive life-saving treatment at the hospital in which it operates?

**John Howell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The number of Arab children treated by the Israeli doctors at the hospital is phenomenal, and it sets a brilliant example for the whole region.

**Ian Austin:** I want to emphasise this point—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) is laughing and sneering in his usual way, but he ought to listen to this point, because it is really important. The truth is that we come into debates such as this one and hear a binary—*[Interruption.]* Madam Deputy Speaker, hon. Members can shout as much as they like, but I am going to speak.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. No one can shout as much as they like. The hon. Gentleman will be heard.

**Ian Austin:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We hear a binary, simplistic, polarised debate, when the truth about Israel and Palestine is that people on the ground are working together, co-operating, talking and building the peace process that we all want to see. It is about time people listened to that argument instead of laughing at it.

**John Howell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman kindly for his comments. I was about to come on to that.

**Mr Betts:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John Howell:** I have given way twice, and I am not giving way again.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are having very short speeches, and the interventions have been longer than the speeches. Let us allow Mr Howell to make his speech.

**John Howell:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point I was about to make was that here we have a wonderful example of co-operation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and yet we are focusing on one issue—settlements. I would be the first to admit that settlement expansion is counter-productive, but we have heard from speaker after speaker that settlements are not the cause of conflict. They are not the cause of the violence, which long predates the existence of settlements, in this part of the world.

If that is the case, why are we picking settlements out for discussion? Settlements are one of the five final status issues, which also include borders, the status of Jerusalem, security and Palestinian sovereignty. A whole range of issues need to be addressed if the situation is to be moved forward. I was able in a recent meeting of the Council of Europe to expand on the matter for a little longer than I have now, particularly in relation to the activities of Hamas in Gaza. As I have already mentioned in an intervention, the Israelis pulled out 8,000 Israeli settlers, including their dead, from Gaza and they have been greeted by the almost 20,000 rockets that have been launched at them.

The interesting thing about Gaza, as my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) has mentioned, is that the restrictions on it are being implemented by Egypt as well as by Israel. I spoke to Anwar Sadat, the leader of the Reform and Development party in Egypt, and he said, "We are not going to sort out the problems of Gaza until terrorism in Egypt stops." That was his message for the area. Settlements in East Jerusalem, for example, account for 1% of the territory.

The motion calls for the internationalisation of the peace process, and I do not think that that is very productive. The question that has been asked on a number of occasions is: what is required? What should we do? Direct peace talks are required between Israel and the Palestinians, without preconditions. Unfortunately, the Palestinian side comes up with preconditions every time, and those preconditions usually involve the release of yet more terrorists. If we look at Israel's record over settlements, we see that in 2010 there was a 10-month moratorium, but the Palestinians allowed nine months to slip by before they resumed peace talks; they did not take it seriously. A month ago, as I have mentioned, Israel evicted 50 families from homes in Amona. In 2005, we saw the situation in Gaza, and in 2008 Israel made a fantastic offer to withdraw from 94% of the west bank.

The issue that needs to be discussed is how that fits in with land swaps. That needs to be dealt with face to face in negotiations between the two parties. At the moment, all that Israel has got out of the process is a denial of its right to exist, an intensification of violence and demands for the release of yet more terrorists. I do not think anyone should ignore the fact that that is happening because the Palestinians are scared of their own elections. Polling suggests that they are going to lose, whether we are talking about the Palestinian Authority or Hamas, and, sadly, they are going to be succeeded by organisations that are in favour of ISIS.



1.45 pm

**Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): I thank the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) for securing this important debate. This is not the first time I have raised the issue of Palestinian rights in Parliament; sadly, I am sure it will not be the last.

In 2012, when I was chair of Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East, I had the privilege of visiting the west bank for the second time. I saw at first hand the degrading and inhuman way in which Palestinians were treated by the Israelis, who had demolished or stolen their homes. I also saw the effect that that had on Palestinian businesses and farmers. The suffering and the sense of loss experienced by the Palestinian people are indescribable. The loss that they have suffered is illegal under international law—a theft of land that continues to be denounced by world leaders across the globe and condemned, quite rightly, by the United Nations. Above all else, the perpetual land grabs are not only immoral and illegal, but a barrier to peace.

Although the Palestinians must provide assurances that Israel will be able to live in peace beside a Palestinian state, the Israelis, too, must come to peace talks in good faith. How can Palestinians take a peace offer seriously when settlements continue to be built? How can Palestinians trust Israel to recognise a Palestinian state when their homes are being demolished? How can Palestinians believe in a genuine two-state solution based on the 1967 borders when Israel continues its encirclement of East Jerusalem? The settlements must stop in order to give any framework for peace a chance, and Britain must be at the forefront of that effort. Britain has a moral responsibility to the Palestinian people, given our role in the region and our betrayal of the people who lived under our mandate after the first world war.

Given the new President in the White House, our country has to play a more important leadership role. Many in this House may be sceptical about the idea that the US has ever been an honest broker in this conflict. However, despite its strong ties with Israel, the US has condemned settlements and aggression. Trump's view of the conflict appears to be a world apart from that of the former Secretary of State, John Kerry. Trump has made potentially inflammatory remarks about moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, and he has selected a pro-settlement real estate lawyer to be the US ambassador to Israel. That has so emboldened the Israeli right that within days of the Trump inauguration, the Israeli Government announced their plans to build a further 2,500 housing units in the west bank.

**Helen Goodman:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that to make it clear to the Israelis how unsatisfactory the situation is, we should adopt the same policy as we have adopted towards the Russians over their invasion of Crimea and introduce personal sanctions on those who promote and benefit from the settlements?

**Simon Danczuk:** I appreciate the intervention, and I have to agree that there needs to be some consistency in British foreign relations regarding our attitude towards different countries.

Let me start to conclude. I am glad that Britain, alongside the EU, denounced the awful regulation law allowing further housing units to be built. That allays

some of the fears I have that Britain is turning its back on the safeguarding of human rights and the promotion of democracy. However, I worry that in this post-Brexit world, such values will be sidelined as the Government seek to secure trade deals. I know that trade was on the agenda at the Prime Minister's meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister and I am sure many benefits can be gained from the new UK-Israel trade working group, but will the Minister assure me and my colleagues that the UK's opposition to the new settlements in the west bank will be made forcefully? What is more, will he assure us that increased trade with Israel will not benefit those making a living out of the illegal occupation? Such small steps could make a difference.

In conclusion, Britain must live up to its responsibilities to the Palestinians. The aid we give makes a difference and it must continue, as must our criticism of illegal settlements, and our vocal condemnation must get louder if the US Administration choose to turn their back completely on the Palestinian people.

1.50 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), who made an eloquent speech.

The motion before us is a curate's egg—good in parts. At its heart, there is a false assertion. As hon. Members have said, the only way in which this crisis in the middle east will ever be solved is by face-to-face negotiations between the Palestinian leaders and the state of Israel. As we all know, this area of the world has had a long history of being occupied by empires down through the ages. The Ottoman empire ruled the area until the time of the first world war, when the British mandate came in, and the reality is that the west bank was annexed by Jordan in 1950. To call it occupied territory is of course to suggest that a country once existed, but it has never existed. That is the real dilemma in this whole problem.

I absolutely think that United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 should not have been supported by the United Kingdom Government; it was wrong for them to do so. It was passed in the dying days of President Obama's presidency, and his refusal to support Israel in its hour of need was a deliberate swipe at that country, as history will show. However, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on distancing herself from John Kerry's one-sided speech. That was a unique point in history, because it was the first time that a British Government had distanced themselves from the serving Secretary of State of our greatest ally in the world. I congratulate the Government on not sending individuals to the Paris conference, which attempted to internationalise the solution to the problem.

I want to ask the Minister about one particular issue. What is his view of the Oslo accords and the agreements that the Palestinians made with the Israeli Government? Under those agreements, it was quite clear that developments could take place in area C of the west bank—that was permitted and agreed to by the Palestinians—so to call this illegal is incorrect.

Equally, we have heard that United Nations resolution 2334 would prevent Jews and Christians from celebrating at the western wall and at the greatest Christian sites. Before 1967, the western wall was out of bounds to Jews, and the same thing would happen again were this

implemented. The green line was never, ever an international line, and there has never, ever been an international agreement on the exact borders of any potential state of Palestine.

I want to talk about something that has not been mentioned thus far: the plight of the 2.3 million Jewish refugees who were forced out of Arab countries and had to flee for their lives. Some of them went to Israel, some to the United States and others to parts of Europe. They are never mentioned, but there clearly has to be a home for them. When the Israeli Government put up housing developments for Jewish people who are refugees from Arab states, we should not condemn them but congratulate them on providing those facilities.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making very pertinent points. Does he agree that the whole point of this debate is that concessions need to be made on both sides? It would be unfortunate if people interpreted it as meaning that everything would be solved if only Israel did this or that. Substantial concessions are needed from both sides.

**Bob Blackman:** My concern, and that of many hon. Members, is that the Palestinians are trying to internationalise the issue—taking their case to the United Nations, and seeking help and assistance from outside—but are not getting the real issue, which is the need for face-to-face talks with the state of Israel to resolve the existing problems so that we can reach a conclusion with a secure state of Israel and a secure state of Palestine. We should always remember that the green line represents an area that would be indefensible for the state of Israel in the event of another war.

**Joan Ryan:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech and giving a historical analysis that has been somewhat lacking. Does he agree that in the process of trying to internationalise the process, rather than accepting that there have to be direct, face-to-face talks, the Palestinians are being misled into believing that peace can be found for them without their having to make any compromise? As the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) said—many hon. Members agree—compromise and trust building on both sides is required.

**Bob Blackman:** We clearly have to build trust and experience on all sides. I have had the experience of going to Israel on six occasions, and I have also had the opportunity to visit the west bank and Jordan with the Palestinian Return Centre. The reality is that the Jordanians did not build trust among the Palestinians at that time; they refused to give them status or title to their land. The problem that still remains is the difficulty of resolving those particular land issues. As the right hon. Lady has outlined, we must build trust through joint projects and by bringing people together so that there can be negotiation, with trust being built between the peoples, rather than their being separated.

It is quite clear that everyone would like the security barrier around Jerusalem to be removed, but it can be removed only when there is trust between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Once that is in place, we can achieve the dream of a two-state solution, with proper viable borders and proper security for both states.

1.57 pm

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): It is extremely important that we recognise and reaffirm the importance of two states—Israel and Palestine—in resolving this tragic conflict between two peoples who are both legitimately seeking self-determination. Together with that, there must be a very clear understanding from the Palestinians that Israel, as a majority Jewish state, is there to stay as part of the middle east, and is not, as they too often suggest, an imposition from outside the area.

The origins of the settler movement, which I do not support, are not often known or understood. In 1967, Israel survived a defensive war, and then found that it was ruling Gaza, which had previously been under the control of Egypt, and the west bank, which had previously been under the control of Jordan. There were strong movements in Israel at the time to trade that land for peace—to trade it for recognition, which is the most basic part of peace. It is tragic that the Arab League Khartoum conference held in 1967 stridently declared to Israel: no peace, no recognition, no negotiation. That gave the green light to the settler movement that followed.

**Ian Austin:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point. She is also showing why comparisons between Israel and Russia are utterly fatuous. In 1967, Israel was invaded, but it managed to deal with the invasion. That was when the west bank and Gaza came under Israel's control. That is the issue that both sides ought to be sitting down to try to resolve at the moment.

**Mrs Ellman:** I agree with my hon. Friend.

Settlements are a problem, but they are not the only problem, and they are certainly not the only barrier to peace. In Sinai in 1979, in an agreement with Egypt that survives to this day, Israel withdrew not just from Sinai but from its settlements there. Israel unilaterally withdrew 8,000 settlers and soldiers from Gaza in 2005. It demolished its settlements and, tragically, that has not led to peace. In every attempt to make peace—there have been a number in recent years—with Palestinians and others, a solution has been found to settlements, whether that means land swaps or settlements becoming part of a Palestinian state.

**Crispin Blunt:** The hon. Lady's version of history and what happened in 1967—she agreed with the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin)—is somewhat disputed. The key issue is that the settlements on the west bank are changing the physical geography. They are a physical barrier to change, rather than simply a policy barrier to change for both parties. The scale of the challenge on the west bank is that there are 400,000 rather than just 8,000 settlements. Therefore, vast political investment is needed, and it becomes more difficult every day for Israel to deliver an agreement as the settler interest becomes greater.

**Mrs Ellman:** I agree that the settlement policy is certainly not helpful, but it has developed because of the intransigence of the Palestinians and a failure to reach agreement.

I accept that settlements are a problem, but they are not an unsolvable one and they are certainly not the only one. One critical problem and barrier to resolving the situation is the deliberate incitement by the Palestinian

[Mrs Ellman]

Authority and Hamas. Hamas is explicitly anti-Semitic—it has talked about Jews ruling the world and made a statement about killing every Jew behind a rock—but the Palestinian Authority is not totally innocent either.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the Palestinian campaign of incitement to violence and individual terrorism. In the 12 months after October 2015—it is not finished yet—there were 169 stabbings, 128 shootings and 54 car rammings. Forty-six Israeli civilians were killed and more than 650 were injured on the streets of Israel. Individual terrorists—they are sometimes as young as 12 and 13—are fired up with hatred to go out on those streets and kill Israelis. That includes a teenage boy pulling a 13-year-old boy off his bike and stabbing him. That is because of incitement and the creation of hatred.

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

**Mrs Ellman:** Not just now.

The Palestinian Authority has taken actions such as naming schools after terrorists. One is named after Dalal Mughrabi, who organised the 1978 coastal road massacre, when a school bus was attacked and 37 people were killed, including 12 children. That is just one example of the Palestinian Authority—not Hamas, but the Palestinian Authority—honouring terrorists, calling them martyrs and encouraging others to do the same.

I could mention the case of Dafna Meir, a nurse and mother to six children who was murdered in her home. Thirteen-year-old Noah was stabbed and critically injured while he rode his bike on the streets of Pisgat Ze'ev in northern Jerusalem. Alon Govberg, Chaim Haviv and Richard Laken were killed as they rode on a bus in Armon Hanatziv in southern Jerusalem. They were victims of what President Abbas himself called a "peaceful uprising".

If that does not make the point enough, I remind hon. Members that, just last month, President Abbas's party honoured the martyrdom of Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian female suicide bomber, who in 2002 used her cover as a volunteer for the Palestinian Red Crescent to enter Jerusalem in an ambulance. There, in the words of Fatah's official Facebook page, she used

"an explosive belt...so that her pure body would explode into pieces in the Zionists' faces".

She did indeed kill an Israeli and injured more than 100 other people.

**Richard Burden** *rose*—

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mrs Ellman:** I am sorry but time is running out.

Those acts are horrendous. I ask all hon. Members to consider the role of incitement and the stirring up of hatred in creating a massive barrier to peace. The solution is for both peoples—Israelis and Palestinians—to sit together in direct talks and agree a compromise and a negotiated agreement, so that there is a secure Israel and a secure Palestine, and a homeland for Israelis, Jews and Palestinians.

2.5 pm

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), whose views on this issue I

greatly respect. She clearly knows a huge amount about the subject. She is right about the disgusting incitement from the Palestinian side. On the other side, however, some of the language and behaviour of extremist Jewish settlers, particularly in places such as Hebron, is equally vile. We will never find a resolution to the conflict unless we deal with both sides of the argument.

I have been to Israel, the west bank and Gaza seven times. I have had the peculiar privilege of standing in Gaza looking out over to Israel, and of standing in Israel looking out over to Gaza. My late uncle served with British forces in Mandate Palestine after the end of the second world war. The Northamptonshire Regiment was instrumental in liberating Palestine, which is now Israel, from the Ottoman empire in the first world war. There were three huge battles in Gaza. Six men from the town of Desborough in my constituency were killed on the same day in the first world war in the third battle of Gaza. I had the privilege of laying a wreath on their behalf at the Commonwealth war graves cemetery in the middle of Gaza City on one of my visits.

**Dr Mathias:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extraordinary that, even during all the conflicts and intifadas, the British cemeteries in Gaza have been well maintained?

**Mr Hollobone:** Yes, and the elderly gentleman who maintains the Commonwealth war graves in Gaza City was awarded the MBE, of which he was extraordinarily proud. I believe he has been looking after the graves for something like 60 years.

My point was that Britain's connection with the region goes back an awfully long way. For the best part of 30 years after the first world war, we did our best to try to come to a reconciled solution between Arabs and Jews. As a nation we failed, which was why we pulled out in 1948.

We will not solve the problem of Israel and the Palestinians this afternoon. We are being asked to agree to or oppose a motion on Israeli settlements. Yes, they are not the only issue, but that issue is the only one on the Order Paper. I support Her Majesty's Government's opposition to Israeli settlements.

**Stephen Timms:** I agree with the position the hon. Gentleman sets out. Does he agree that it would be helpful if the British Government made it clearer that British firms should not be trading with those illegal settlements?

**Mr Hollobone:** I hope that the Minister will address that in his response to the pertinent question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne). What more are Her Majesty's Government going to do to let the Israeli Government know that we are opposed to settlements—and that we mean it? What more will we do apart from just shouting from the touchline?

**Ian Austin:** What evidence is there that sanctions and boycotts, which drive people further apart, will achieve anything? Surely we should be arguing for trade and investment with the west bank—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order.



**Mr Hollobone:** I am not in favour of boycotts or divestment, whatever the issue. I am in favour of Her Majesty's Government having a robust method of action against the Israeli Government to ensure that they are clear about our policy. I voted for the recognition of Palestine and would do the same every day of the week. I am also a friend of Israel, which is a fantastic country that has brought many benefits to the world. We have heard about Save a Child's Heart and the work that Israeli surgeons are doing to help vulnerable children from all nations around the world, including Muslim nations. Israel is a leader in the hi-tech industry and in medicine—many NHS medicines come from Israel—and a key ally in very rough and dangerous part of the world. But our friend and ally Israel now finds itself in the 50th year of a military occupation of 2.5 million people. Speaking as a candid friend, surely it is our duty to say to Israel, "You cannot go on like this."

Hon. Members have spoken in favour of international and bilateral talks. I do not mind particularly what the talks are, so long as people start talking to each other. Clearly, we will ultimately have to end up with bilateral talks, but it is wrong to say that international talks are a diversion. The state of Israel was established as a result of international action through the United Nations. We have to be realistic. As friends of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, we have to say, "For goodness sake, how long does this have to go on?" Nowhere in the history of the world has there been 50 years of military occupation.

Both Israel and Palestine could have a fantastic future. Both are very entrepreneurial countries. Both have a lot of get up and go. Both have very civilised and educated peoples. They could be leaders to the world in how two conflicting peoples can come together in reconciliation and develop a wonderful future for themselves. Her Majesty's Government, in the 100th year of the Balfour declaration, have a bigger role to play than they might realise. They should seize this opportunity to knock heads together and say, "How can Britain help you two, our friends, to come together?"

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. It will be obvious to the House that so far, because of lots of interventions, every speech has been well in excess of four minutes. We now have to reduce the time limit to three minutes.

2.11 pm

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I would like to draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Last year, I went to the west bank. My visit was paid for by Fatah UK and organised by Travel2Palestine.

It is clear that the settlements are in breach of international law. The International Court of Justice and the UN resolution in December last year found that to be the case. There should not be any argument about that; we should just accept that the settlements are illegal and work from there. The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) is absolutely right. The motion before us is about the settlements and we should concentrate on that. That is what we are discussing today. No one is saying that they are the only barrier to peace, but they are a barrier. Removing the settlements would not

create a peaceful agreement. Nevertheless, while the settlements are there—certainly while they continue to be built—we are not going to get a peace agreement. That is the reality.

The Israelis say they want talks to begin without preconditions, but they do not. They want the precondition that they can carry on building settlements while negotiations take place. That is absolutely fundamental. For the Israelis to say that they will stop building the settlements and negotiate while no settlements are being built would be an important step forward.

The problem with the settlements being a barrier—this point has just been made—is that they fragment the land that Palestine will form as a state. It is impossible to form a geographical entity of the state while there are settlements dotted around it. That is the problem. We could partly deal with it by swaps and land swaps. The Palestinian Authority does not rule out land swaps as part of eventual settlement, but the more settlements that are built, the harder an eventual peace agreement will be to formulate. That is the reality.

**Dr Monaghan:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given that the settlements in the west bank are illegal, there will be no peace unless Israel starts to recognise and adhere to international law?

**Mr Betts:** Absolutely. There cannot be a peace agreement when one side does not recognise international law. That goes without saying.

The impact of the settlements on the economy of Palestine has to be understood. Palestinian people describe their journeys to work, a distance of 6 or 7 miles, as taking two or three hours because of the checkpoints that exist by and large to protect the settlements and Israeli interests. That is the reality of everyday life for Palestinian citizens and it damages the economy. The mayor of Hebron explains that the city wants and needs to expand. It cannot expand because the area outside Hebron is in area C, which is controlled by the Israelis, who do not allow the Palestinians to build there. Hebron is constrained. It cannot expand and that destroys its economic base.

There is hate and division. Go to the checkpoints and see the hatred that is formed between young Palestinians held up at gunpoint and strip-searched in the street, and the young Israeli soldiers who are the same age. The whole process brutalises both sides and sows the seeds of hatred for years to come.

Look at the racism. I am sorry, but it is racism when, because of their race, people are treated differently on whether they can build on a piece of land, get through a checkpoint easily or have to go to a different checkpoint, or, most fundamentally, have access to water. Israeli settlements have access to water seven days a week in the summer. Palestinians have to put water tanks on their roof, because they do not have the same access. What could be more discriminatory than that?

The Government supported the UN resolution in December. What will they now do to implement it?

2.16 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): This is the longest-running conflict in the modern era and its solution seems further away than ever, but its very intractability

[Tommy Sheppard]

is a reason why we should rededicate ourselves to trying to move the process forward. Every time the international community has considered the competing claims in the region, they have arrived at the same conclusion: that two states living side by side, one Jewish in character and one Arab in character, in peaceful coexistence is the solution to aim for. That was true when Balfour and Sykes looked at it 100 years ago; it was true when the fledgling UN considered what to do after the mandate in the late 1940s; and it was true when the Palestinians and the Israelis met in Oslo, under international support, in the last round of peace talks.

There are two fundamental truths for people who believe in the two-state solution. First, one state exists and one state does not. Trying to create and bring into existence the state of Palestine is therefore the world's unfinished business, and we should support that. Secondly, there cannot be a two-state solution while one state is in military occupation of the lands designated for the other. At some stage, the occupation will have to end if there is to be a two-state solution.

In Oslo, it was agreed that the occupied territories would be divided into zones, with the new Palestinian Authority taking responsibility for the urban areas and the Israeli occupying force responsible for 62% of the land in area C. That, however, was envisaged as a transitional arrangement. People thought that by the end of the century that land and that responsibility would transfer to the Palestinian Authority as it emerged and became a fully-fledged Palestinian state. Not only has that not happened, but the actions of the Israeli Government since have made it even further away than it was then 25 years ago.

**Dr Monaghan:** Does my hon. Friend agree there is an enormous power imbalance between Israel, a state with the fourth largest and strongest army in the world, and Palestine, which is not a state and does not have an army? Palestinians have already conceded 78% of their land. International pressure is needed now. Ignoring UN resolution 2334 is not the way forward.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I agree, which is why the people who talk about face-to-face talks really ought to consider that this is a David and Goliath situation. In any conflict where that situation has existed and peace has been achieved, it has been with international support and an international framework. It was true with the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, too. We need to listen to the Palestinians when they appeal for our help and support to try to achieve a resolution.

Over the past 25 years, the Israeli Government have, in contravention of the fourth Geneva convention, moved half a million of their own civilian population into an area in which they are in military occupation. That is why people call the settlements illegal. At some stage, they will have to be dealt with. There will need to be land swaps. Some settlers may wish to be Palestinian citizens and some may wish to take advantage of relocation schemes to go into Israel proper, but the issue will have to be dealt with. Every brick that is laid and every new apartment that is built in the settlement complex puts a solution further away. When in a hole, stop digging; that is why the resolution calls on the Israeli Government to review their policy and to put a cessation on settlement

building so that peace talks can begin. To have peace talks, there has to be a ceasefire; stopping building settlements would be the equivalent.

I will finish with four asks to the Minister and the Government. The first is that we implement UN resolution 2334, particularly with regard to differentiation of the occupied territories in Israel proper. The second is—I am out of time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Gentleman will find another way of making his other points.

2.20 pm

**Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab):** I put on record my support for UN resolution 2334, which calls for peace, denounces violence in all its forms and crucially, condemns the building of illegal settlements by the Israeli Government. Time is pressing, Madam Deputy Speaker, so although I recognise that there are many issues to discuss, I will concentrate my remarks on the illegal settlements that the Israeli Government are constructing. Those are clearly obstructing the peace process, which I am sure all Members agree needs to resume urgently.

Surprisingly, one or two Members have cast doubt on whether the settlements are illegal. The position is very clear. For the sake of clarity, let me cite the view of some authorities. The settlements have been declared illegal under international law by numerous UN resolutions, the Geneva convention, the International Court of Justice, the US State Department, the Rome statute, article 2 of the UN charter, the Hague regulations and, most importantly, by this House and Ministers of all parties. The illegality of the settlements was also reaffirmed by UN resolution 2334, which faced no opposition when it was voted on. I could cite other examples, but however we look at the situation, what cannot be contested is that the settlements are illegal.

I turn to the way in which the ongoing construction of illegal settlements obstructs the peace process. A two-state solution is the only viable option for peace in the region, but if we continue to see Palestinian land disappear under illegal settlements, the two-state solution will be dead and with it the hopes of peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike. The answer is a two-state solution—not a one-and-a-bit-state solution. Palestinians will not negotiate for that lesser deal, because it is not the one that they were promised under UN agreements, nor will they negotiate a deal on who gets what land at a time when the Government of Israel are taking chunk after chunk of the very same land away.

Time does not permit me to speak for much longer. What is paramount for peace in the region is peace between Israel and Palestine. That is what I want to see, as I hope we all do, but illegal settlements have to stop before we can reach that point or even get back on the path to it. I ask the Minister to condemn the further illegal settlements announced since resolution 2334, and will he tell me what concrete steps the Government are taking to move forward?

2.23 pm

**Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab):** Like many in this House who are determined to see a peaceful solution in the middle east, I welcome this timely debate, which

allows us to reaffirm our support for lasting peace and to commend the Government on signing UN resolution 2334 last December. As the Palestinians have done since 1993, I recognise and accept a two-state solution and Israel's existence. However, the last two weeks has seen that vision placed at greater risk by the acts of the Israeli Government—a democracy that does not live up to the values that it espouses. The passing of the regulation law, which even the hard-right MP, Benny Begin, described as the “robbery law”, flies in the face of the resolution and international efforts for peace.

The UN resolution could not set out more clearly the international law on settlements and settlement expansion in occupied Palestine. We as a country have been very clear that settlements are an obstacle to peace, have no legality and are against international law. We have tolerated Israel changing the physical reality on the ground. We must never tolerate any attempt to change the legal position.

In drafting and signing the UN resolution, we have committed ourselves to a number of essential positions: we call on both sides to act on the basis of international law; we reiterate that settlements and further expansion are a flagrant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace; we accept no change to the 1967 border that is not agreed by both sides; and we will do everything to encourage peace.

Passing the regulation law flies in the face of everything that we declared at the UN. It is a travesty for a Government to legislate in a land that is not under the rule of their Parliament, where the people of that land have no representation. It is a signal that the UN, the ICC and global diplomatic efforts have no impact on the actions of the current Government.

Many have spoken out in condemnation of the law, which the UN special envoy to the middle east described as crossing “a thick red line” and by a former Israeli Minister as “evil and dangerous”. It is against the principles of democracy and Israeli law and even the Israeli Attorney General is likely to argue against it in court.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) on securing the debate, and I support the motion. It is high time that we moved beyond condemnations and hollow words of support. We must support moves towards accountability and demonstrate our commitment to the rule of law. Only then can we shape a different future for these children and generations to come. Celebrating Amona is disheartening. Israel was just abiding by the law—it was asked to remove occupants from Amona, and that was not to be celebrated.

2.26 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests; I visited the west bank last year as a guest of Medical Aid for Palestinians. I disagree with Members who have criticised the motion because it does not deal with issues other than settlements. A motion on settlements is perfectly appropriate. I believe that they are not the only issue, but they are the most important one.

As the mover of the motion, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), said, it is a relatively anodyne motion in that sense, so I hope

everyone can support it. I say that for two reasons. First, the tragedy of Palestine is the occupation. The length of the occupation and the fact that it has happened are what distinguishes this from many other conflicts around the world. The settlements are the embodiment of occupation. Everything else that is wrong in the occupied territories flows from those settlements; 85% of the barrier, which is there to protect the settlements, is in occupied territory. It has been said that settlements occupy only 1.5% of the land, but they control 42.7% of the land. Palestinians in the west bank are not allowed to build on 60% of the land. There are checkpoints, detention often without trial, and appalling settler violence, with more attacks by settlers on Palestinians than there are attacks by Palestinian settlers in the west bank. We have heard about all the types of petty apartheid, separate legal systems and a military law for Palestinians controlled by the Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, a settler himself, who is on record as having said that Palestinian citizens of Israel who are disloyal to Israel should have their heads chopped off. He is in charge of the west bank.

Secondly, we are at a crucial point, with 6,000 new settler units having been declared since Donald Trump went into the White House. As we have heard, there is the burglary law, as it has been described by a member of Likud, with 4,000 illegal outposts now legitimised.

In the short time I have left, let me make one point to the Minister. Despite the alternative facts we have heard this afternoon, we know that settlements are illegal. What are the Government going to do about them? Why can we not stop trading with illegal settlements? It would not be a boycott—let us not confuse one for the other. Why can we not ensure clearer guidelines for businesses to stop them doing that? Why can we not prevent financial transactions, as was done with Crimea, and why can we not have a database, as the UN asked for, in respect to all those issues? I would be grateful for specific answers from the Minister. Of course we are looking for a condemnation, but we are also looking for action from the British Government.

**Mrs Ellman:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise. When I spoke, I omitted to draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests concerning my recent visit to Israel as part of a Labour Friends of Israel delegation. I would like to correct the record.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for correcting the record.

**Imran Hussain:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I, too, omitted to draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I, too, visited Israel and Palestine with a delegation last year.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman.

**Tommy Sheppard:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also wish to draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I went on a trip to Israel and the west bank last year with the UK branch of the Fateh Movement.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Does anyone else wish to make a point of order?



**Joan Ryan:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If a Member has visited Israel or Palestine in the last year and has registered it in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, are they required to make a declaration here?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** It is for individual Members to decide how, and in what manner, they declare where they might have benefited, financially or otherwise, from an outside organisation with an interest in the current debate. Of course the rules are very strict about what is in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as the right hon. Lady has just said.

**Joan Ryan:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Having heard your guidance, I declare that I have made several visits to Israel and Palestine over the last year, all of which were supported and financed by Labour Friends of Israel, but from which I have made no personal gain.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady.

**Richard Burden:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Not wishing to be left out, I wish to draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests regarding a visit to the west bank last year, co-organised by the Council for Arab-British Understanding and Medical Aid for Palestinians and paid for by the Sir Joseph Hotung Charitable Settlement.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Would anyone else like to tell us of their travel experiences?

**Ian Austin:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not realise we were required to do this. I said in my speech that I had been to Israel recently. Given that everyone else has done so, I feel that I ought to draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I visited Israel recently. I met politicians in Israel and Palestine. The trip was funded by Labour Friends of Israel.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman mentioned that. I recall him saying it. We have now taken up the time allowed for an entire speech, but it is right that hon. Members behave honourably in these matters.

2.33 pm

**Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op):** As has become the fashion, I declare my visits to Palestine and Israel over the past 15 years financed by various organisations.

The focus of this debate—settlements—is narrow but nevertheless very important. Some hon. Members have sought to trivialise the issue of settlements, but while they might not be the most important issue, they are nevertheless very important. We need only look at UN resolutions 242 and 338, dated 1967 and 1973, in which the key phrase refers to the:

“Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict”.

It is clear that the Israeli armed forces will not be withdrawn as long as settlements exist in the west bank, so it goes without saying that settlements embody a crucial part of the problem. When I first visited Palestine,

14 or 15 years ago, there were about 50,000 settlers in the west bank. When I last visited, that number had increased to about 500,000, and I understand that the latest figure is about 600,000. The situation on the ground is changing extremely quickly, and the longer the conflict goes on, the further out of reach a two-state solution will drift. So much land will have been taken that there will be very little left for a contiguous state, as I hope the Government will recognise.

As we know, settlements were the main focus of resolution 2334 passed on 23 December. We also know that the policy of the US, the UN, the EU and the UK Government, as repeated endlessly by Ministers in the House, is that settlements are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. I do not know, therefore, how anyone can say that settlements are not part and parcel of the solution to the problem. It is said that there should be no preconditions before talks, but clearly the UN resolutions are not preconditions; they refer to international law, so the discussions and direct talks should take place on that basis. I urge the Government to recognise Palestine and apply pressure on the US and elsewhere to ensure that a two-state solution is still viable.

2.36 pm

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** As others have reflected, settlements are illegal under international law and a physical barrier to the peace process, as well as a metaphorical barrier. Through the settlement and outpost system, Palestinians are being denied access to 50% of the land, which is clearly a huge issue for those who live there.

Like many others, I have visited Palestine—I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—and seen the systemic development of outposts and settlements, which, at best, are intended to control the Palestinians and, at worst, are part of the complete annexation of the west bank. The network of settlements, outposts, checkpoints and associated security buffer zones, patrolled by the Israel Defence Force, means that Israel controls access to natural resources, including grazing grounds, olive groves, water supplies and the movement of animals.

On one trip, I saw a settlement positioned, nice and bright, on the top of a hill, with plenty of green shrubbery made possible by the piped water supply. Meanwhile, the closest Bedouin village, despite having electricity pylons running past it, is not allowed to connect to the electricity. The water supply for the settlement runs through the Bedouin village, but the villagers are not allowed access to it. The school in the village is part funded by the EU but has a demolition order hanging over it. That is state intimidation by Israel.

Forced movement of people is illegal. It is sometimes dressed up as moving people on so that they might enjoy a better lifestyle, but we have seen examples of that in history and it is a false premise. We saw it with the native Americans and Scottish highlanders. They are moves done to, not for, people.

I also visited the Bedouin village of Susiya. It has been subject to demolitions for no other reason than it is deemed to be too close to an adjacent settlement. I saw its water cistern ruined by debris, including a car door forced into it, I saw the caves they used to inhabit

completely destroyed, and I saw the rocky land in which they are forced to grow subsistence crops. I heard how they could no longer access their cisterns in the fields for drinking water and their animals and were forced to spend 30% of their income on water that they used to access for free.

I mentioned a school with a demolition order hanging over it. Israel has acted with impunity over demolitions because the international community has not acted. The UK and the EU have never asked for redress for demolitions, and it is time that that changed, given that 180 structures, partly funded by the EU, and therefore the UK, have been demolished, but there has been no redress. As part of a ministerial correction yesterday, I received a letter referring to a £5 million project in Hebron that had suffered demolition. When will the Minister ask for that £5 million back, and when will we take action against Israel over demolitions?

2.39 pm

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Members who have brought this motion to the House, given how important the issue is.

These are fitful times. As we move into the centenary year of the Balfour declaration, it is chilling to see the President of the United States openly promote those with hideous anti-Semitic views or in France to watch the rise of a presidential candidate whose party has for decades traded in the despicable sewers of anti-Jewish sentiment. That makes it all the more important for us in Britain to uphold our principles, and to speak out in a clear voice when our allies threaten them.

The departure from our steadfast commitment to a peaceful two-state solution in recent months has sent dangerous signals to the rest of the world. As the United Nations Human Rights Council found, while fenced areas of settlements cover only 3% of the west bank, in reality 43% of the territory is allocated to local and regional settlement councils. If that control is legalised, legitimised and expanded, it represents one of the most grievous blows to the prospects for peace for decades. It was therefore astonishing when our Prime Minister chose to use a balanced speech by the outgoing United States Secretary of State to signal a divergence from the position of our closest ally.

Senator Kerry spoke of a Government “more committed to settlements” than any previous Government, and of the systematic consolidation of control over the west bank that is leading towards the inevitability of one state and the near extinction of the prospects for peace. The outgoing Obama Administration reacted with understandable shock to the criticism, which stemmed not from the Foreign Office but from the Prime Minister herself. They said:

“We are surprised by the UK Prime Minister’s office statement given that Secretary Kerry’s remarks...were in line with the UK’s own long-standing policy and its vote at the United Nations”.

I have no doubt that that criticism, and the warm embrace of a new President in the United States who is determined to support existing settlements, emboldened the Israeli Government, who have announced, for the first time in decades, thousands of new buildings in the occupied territories. Our absence from the European Council in Malta, when the decision was taken to

postpone a scheduled summit in late February with the Prime Minister of Israel, underscored our diminishing influence.

There can rarely have been a time in the post-war world when our moral voice has been quite so weak. I urge the Government not to jettison our historic role and credibility as a partner of peace for the sake of a quick trade deal. I urge the Minister to do what the Prime Minister could not, and condemn the land regularisation legislation that seeks to legitimise the illegitimate and will do untold damage in the long search for peace.

2.42 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful for being called to speak briefly, and I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh).

In opening the debate, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) made most of the points that needed to be made about the settlements, and those who spoke after him added significantly to what he had said, from both perspectives of the conflict. I have received nearly 100 emails from constituents asking me to support the debate. On their behalf, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving me the opportunity to do so, and also thank the sponsors for securing the debate.

Like other Members who have spoken, I want to see a two-state solution, but that seems more remote than ever. I look forward to hearing the Minister not only outline—or rather repeat—the UK Government’s support for peace, but, more importantly, to explain how the Government intend to contribute to the task of helping to bring the two sides together. As has been said by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) and others, face-to-face talks are the only way forward.

Settlement building by the Israeli Government seems totally contrary to any peace process. Briefing circulated by the Britain-Palestine all-party parliamentary group, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), states:

“The influx of settlers into the West Bank and East Jerusalem significantly increases tension in the region”.

That includes

“Violence perpetrated by and against settlers. Freedom of movement restrictions on the Palestinian population. Detention and prosecution of Palestinian adults and children in military courts. House demolitions. Land expropriation. Restrictions on agricultural and other economic activity.”

All those matters have been referred to during today’s debate.

These decisions by the Israeli Government not only do not help the desperate situation in the area, but, in my opinion, make it worse. However, I recognise the provocation, and it is important to emphasise that that provocation is not one-sided.

As has been said, 2017 is a very significant year historically. It is the anniversary of the Balfour declaration, the UN partition and the 1967 war, among other events. Is it too much to hope that history will bear down on those involved to restart talks? I do not overestimate our role, but the UK is a significant player, both historically and diplomatically, as was eloquently articulated by the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone). I look

[Jim Fitzpatrick]

forward to hearing both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) outline how it can best play its part.

As we have heard from every Member who has spoken so far, we all want peace, but, as many have observed, it seems very far away, and, in my view, the settlement building is not helping.

2.45 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): At a time when we are seeing rising anti-Semitism in Europe and rising hate crime, even in this country, post-Brexit, this debate should not be an excuse for Israel-bashing—or, indeed, the demonising of all Palestinians as terrorists. Israel is arguably a small country surrounded by inhospitable neighbours and some of the most lethal terrorist groups on earth. Its people should obviously live in peace and security, free from the fear of rocket attacks, and, crucially—as was restated during Prime Minister's questions yesterday—as part of a two-state solution, alongside a viable Palestinian state.

Today, however, we are talking specifically about settlements. Since I spotted the title of the debate, the issue of settlements seems to have been popping up everywhere. At the time of the recognition debate in 2014, we heard about 400,000 dwellers; the figure is now 600,000. On Sunday, in the American thriller “Homeland”, the character Saul went to visit the sister with whom he had grown up in America, and who was now living in a west bank settlement. He asked her, “How can you live, knowing that your very presence here makes peace less possible?”

My interest in speaking in the debate—I am making my declaration on the spot!—was spurred on by the fact that last month I had been part of a cross-party delegation to the Holy Land, which included Members who are present today, to see for myself what was going on. While we were there, we went to the Knesset. We met representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—a UN human rights agency—and of the British consulate. We met Israeli members of think-tanks, and Israeli journalists. We met Palestinians, including Christians: this is not just a Muslim-Jewish issue. Some of them had lived elsewhere; one, Javier, had come back from Argentina. Some had lived in Salford, and one had lived in America. They had all come back in the late 1990s thinking that peace was around the corner, but it seemed to them now that there had been a stalemate since the Oslo accords.

We went to Nablus and Hebron, and other places that I had known about for as long as I could remember. From now on, whenever I hear “O little town of Bethlehem”, I shall not be able to get out of my mind the separation barrier with the Banksy graffiti on it; the same goes for William Blake's “Jerusalem”. We saw armed guards, because it is a very securitised, militarised place. I shall never be able to un-see those images.

The beauty of having iPads was that we were never out of the office. I was receiving emails from constituents worried about UN Resolution 2334, which they felt was de-legitimising Israel, but also from constituents angry about the destruction of two Bedouin villages. We spoke

to the governor of Nablus, who said, “Yes, this is happening—just down the road.” It was an eye-opening experience: I had seen nothing like this before.

While we were there, there were calls for the pardoning of an Israeli soldier who had shot an injured Palestinian teenager in the head. When we got back, we saw on the news—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Lady has now reached her finishing time.

**Dr Huq:** But I had more to say!

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady may have other opportunities. I am sorry, but that is the situation.

I now call the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who is not required to stand. I know that she was interested in speaking from a sedentary position.

2.48 pm

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, but I will stand.

According to the United Nations, a quarter of households in the occupied territories have insecure access to food, and an estimated 1 million are in need of health and nutrition assistance. The UN estimates that, overall, 2 million people in the occupied territories will need some form of humanitarian help in 2017. It summarises the situation as

“a systematic denial of Palestinian rights”,

and

“a man-made humanitarian crisis that has gone on for far too long”.

The Government have confirmed that in the past year, 1,010 Palestinian homes and other buildings have been destroyed, dismantled or confiscated in area C and east Jerusalem—the highest figure in east Jerusalem since 2000—leaving 1,476 people, including 696 children, displaced and vulnerable. I am sure we all agree that those figures are very disturbing, and speak to the pain and trauma of many families. As well as dismantling Palestinian homes, the Israeli authorities demolished 274 “humanitarian structures”: tents, shelters, and buildings housing the homeless. The UN said that that situation was unprecedented; it is unprecedented, but it is also intolerable and inhumane.

This disregard for human rights does not just apply in Gaza and the west bank. Recently, I asked a series of parliamentary questions about the Bedouin communities in Israel, and in particular the village of Umm al-Hiran near Hura. It appears that a forced demolition is taking place at this village—something condemned as

“a blatant and ugly episode of discrimination mirroring Israel's unlawful settlements.”

As we have heard, the Israeli Parliament passed a law that legalised 4,000 Israeli settlement buildings, in direct contravention both of international law and previous decisions of the Israeli courts. The Minister knows that the new US President has expressed strong support for Israel, even going so far as to suggest that UN resolution 2334—a clear and straightforward reaffirmation of international principles—would not have been passed if it had been put forward after his inauguration.



Does the Minister think that Israel's recent acceleration of its illegal settlement policies is in any way linked to the change of US President? Is there now geopolitical cover for settlement expansion, provided by the US? If so, what can the Minister do about it?

To date, the Government's response has been to express concern. They have "expressed concern" for a long time about the continuing settlement policy. In answer to my questions about the forced demolition of Bedouin homes, they were

"concerned by recent reports of violence",

and just this week they expressed their official "concern" about the land regularisation Bill that passed through the Israeli Parliament.

2.51 pm

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): I thank and congratulate the hon. Members who secured today's debate.

Little did we know when this debate was granted last week quite how prescient it would be. Just as the Israeli Prime Minister was flying back after his visit here, the Knesset was passing the so-called regularisation Bill. This Bill retroactively legalises over 50 illegal settlement outposts, 3,850 housing units and the expropriation of almost 2,000 acres of private Palestinian lands. In short, it legalises the illegal. I guess that, after alternative facts in Washington, we now have alternative facts on the ground, as defined by the Government of Israel.

This debate is not about being pro-Israel or pro-Palestine; it is about standing up for the values and norms that we hold dear. It is about upholding the rule of law and not shirking our responsibilities. Settlements fan the flames of discontent and grievance, driving us further from peace. They undermine the legal and moral authority of Israel, destroying the trust that will be required to reach any meaningful peace agreement. And they undermine the territorial integrity of a future Palestinian state, and the prospects of a viable two-state solution.

The continued expansion of illegal settlements does not just hurt the Palestinian people; it hurts Israel as well, because there can be no security for Israel without peace, and there can be no peace as long as there are illegal settlements. Anyone who doubts this just needs to see the situation on the ground.

I think of the father I met in Makassad hospital in the wake of the 2014 Gaza war, nursing his four-year-old son who had just lost both his legs in a rocket attack. I think of the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar, the residents living in perpetual fear of military demolitions and harassment from nearby settlers. I think of the 13,000 children from the Shuafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem, crossing multiple checkpoints, passing the wall and fearing harassment, just to get to school each day. I think of the 250,000 children across the Palestinian territories whom the UN identifies as in need of psychosocial support and child protection interventions. I think of the 10-year-old Gazan child who will already have witnessed three wars and nothing but the siege. What does the future hold for these children? What hope can we offer them?

When we boil all the issues down to their essence, the fact is that the presence of almost 600,000 Israeli settlers on land internationally recognised as occupied is what

drives this conflict. Britain, as a key strategic ally, partner and friend of Israel, should be stepping up as a critical friend. That means ending direct support for settlements.

We should, in line with the UK guidelines, prohibit trade with companies and financial institutions complicit in the settlements and prohibit dealings with charities involved in illegal settlement projects. We must be consistent in our alignment with the universal principle of prohibiting trade with illegally annexed territories, as the European Union has done in the case of Crimea. That is why we must do all in our power to halt and reverse the settlements, and that is why we must support the motion.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The winding-up speeches need to begin no later than 3.15 pm and eight Members still wish to contribute. Colleagues can do the arithmetic for themselves.

2.54 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate today. I visited Israel and Palestine with the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding three years ago and saw the construction of settlements first-hand. I also thank my constituents who wrote to me on this issue and supported this debate.

I believe fundamentally in the two-state solution and also that we as an international community must support progressives in Israel as well as Palestine in efforts to secure long-term peace. However, we know that Israeli settlements are illegal and contrary to international law—and, indeed, that they undermine prospects for the viability of the state of Palestine. Settlements are a barrier to trust, and they are a barrier to peace.

I want to make two brief points today: first, on the need for renewed international talks and the need to focus on the issue of children and education in Palestine; and, secondly, to recognise the contribution of associations such as the Britain-Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network here, and also those in the middle east, that do vital work.

Palestinians and Israel must know that, with so many other security issues in the world, they are not forgotten. As political solutions remain a distant hope, the prospects and welfare of children are a matter of great concern. In Gaza, there is an alarming rise in malnutrition among children, because they cannot get the food they need, and a rise in kidney disease among children, because the water is not drinkable. Because there are not enough schools for children, many of the schools are operating double or triple shifts, starting at 6 am and finishing at 6 pm. Parents worried about their children going to school in the dark are making them stay at home, which is having an impact especially on the education of girls.

In the west bank, I have heard from Save the Children that children cannot get to school safely. About 13,000 children in Jerusalem have to cross a checkpoint every day just to get to school. The increase in demolitions affects entire communities, of course, but is particularly traumatic for children who see homes and also schools

[Seema Malhotra]

destroyed. The children of Palestine and Israel today will be the leaders of tomorrow who will need to work on the solution for how they live side by side.

The Britain-Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network recently held its annual meeting in Hounslow. Its work builds an important connection between young people here and in Palestine. Building such cultural and educational links keeps a positive contact with the outside world.

I want to close my remarks with some questions to the Minister. On the basis that the UK Government's condemnation of illegal Israeli settlement building is unchanged, what steps will they take to ensure that action is taken to stop settlements, given Prime Minister Netanyahu's stated determination to expand them? What will the Government do to strengthen their advice to British businesses about avoiding engaging with other businesses that support settlements, so we do everything we can to stop settlements and the illegal enterprise that comes from them?

2.57 pm

**John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I have absolutely nothing to declare, except my recent Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding trip to Israel and the Palestine territories. I have been visiting those countries since the first Gulf war. Back then, Palestinian democrats warned of the rise of the fundamentalist Hamas. They argued that if Israel failed to support an independent Palestinian state, extremism would rise, the centre ground would be lost, and peace would be harder to attain.

In my previous role as a journalist, I interviewed Hanan Ashrawi and the late, great Edward Said. They had a series of reasonable demands. Said spoke of reconciliation and denounced the use of violent rhetoric. Both wanted to see a homeland for the Palestinian people, an acknowledgement of the grave injustices committed towards them—as we know, many of them were driven from their homes and into refugee camps when Israel was created—and, crucially, an assurance that Israeli territorial expansion would end. When I first visited Israel and Palestine, the settler population in the west bank and East Jerusalem was around 200,000. Today, 20 years later, there are more than 600,000 settlers.

People come from across the world to live in Israel, and for lots of reasons, but those seeking a better life in the illegal settlements gain it, alas, by the appropriation of Palestinian land and homes. Palestinian farmland is barren and dry, yet many settlements have swimming pools with illegally funnelled water. Illegal settlers consume six to 10 times more water per head than the Palestinians. Israel's policy of creating "facts on the ground" is brutal and determined to establish so many settlements on the west bank that a contiguous Palestinian state becomes impossible. We must consider the consequences of this for Israel itself. If a viable two-state solution dies and Palestine is subsumed into a greater Israel stretching from the Mediterranean to the Dead sea, what will happen to the 5 million to 6 million Palestinians in the Jewish state with no government of their own?

An abiding memory of my first trip to Israel and Palestine is of taking tea in a refugee camp. Some of the elders got out their British Mandate of Palestine house deeds and, poignantly, the keys to their long-appropriated

houses. They told me that they trusted British honour and British law, and asked why we remained so silent in the face of injustice. It was Edward Said who put it best for me. "Can you explain to me," he asked, "why because of the evil committed against innocents in Europe 60 years ago, you in the west salve your consciences by turning a blind eye to the injustice of my family's expulsion from our home to provide compensation for people in whose oppression we played no part?" This goes to heart of the issue. We cannot turn a blind eye to this theft any longer. We cannot allow the bitterness to pass to another generation.

3 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I should like to thank the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling this debate. I visited the west bank and Jerusalem in January, and I should like to draw the House's attention to what will soon appear in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: the support of the Britain Palestine Communication Centre, the President's office and the Palestinian Mission. Every Palestinian we met—Palestinian Authority members, elected city leaders, political activists and young people—subscribed to the two-state solution and wanted help in ensuring that it is achieved. I saw, as did other colleagues, the settlements marching across the hills over expropriated land, usually illegally. I saw the diverted roads, which Palestinians are not allowed to use, and I saw the march of the fence and the wall through old fields. I saw the occupation and destruction of the old city of Hebron, and the closed businesses there. Yes, the settlements are the issue of today, but if we want to address stone throwing and other violence by Palestinian children, we need only to look at the daily incidents of brutalisation to which they and their families have been subjected for decades.

We visited the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which provided us with accurate, factual information showing that 43% of the west bank is out of bounds to Palestinians. Its maps show a Swiss cheese of disjointed areas of Palestinian land, with the Palestinians effectively excluded from the rest, even if they have historical ownership over it. Hours after meeting our Prime Minister recently, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu returned to Israel to vote on a law that allows the Israeli state to seize land privately owned by Palestinians on the west bank and to grant Jewish settlements exclusive use of the properties there. The decision on 24 January did indeed order 40 or 50 families to be moved from the Amona outpost, but in the same week, approval was given for 2,500 new dwellings on the west bank and 566 new settlement houses in East Jerusalem, taking over thousands of acres of Palestinian land.

The recent legislation imposed Israeli law on Palestinian inhabitants of the west bank, which is not sovereign Israeli territory. The Palestinians living there are not citizens of Israel and do not have the right to vote, but the Israelis living there do. Israeli civil law applies to settlers, affording them all sorts of legal protections, rights and benefits not enjoyed by their Palestinian neighbours, who are subject to Israeli military law. Palestinians should not be made to go through the indignity of negotiating over territory that should be theirs in a future state. This should be an international negotiation in which our Government should play a major part.

3.4 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I was privileged to visit the west bank last year for the first and only time with the Council for Arab-British Understanding and Human Appeal, an award-winning charity. As the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) said earlier, it was a real eye-opener. I had no idea of the size and scale of the settlements, and seeing how big, well serviced and well entrenched they are makes plain the reality of how difficult it will be to move them.

As a lawyer, I was particularly struck by the human rights abuses in the west bank and the absence of the proper rule of law. Other speakers have talked about parallel legal systems, and I want to use the little time I have to make it clear that the settlements are illegal under international law. The international community considers the establishment of settlements in the Israeli-occupied territories illegal under international law because the fourth Geneva convention prohibits countries from moving people into territories occupied in a war. That is a legal fact. I am aware that the state of Israel maintains that the settlements are consistent with international law because it does not agree that the fourth Geneva convention applies. However, the weight of international opinion is against it. All the following organisations have affirmed that the convention does apply and that the settlements are therefore illegal: the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Court of Justice, and the high contracting parties. This is a matter of the rule of law.

I have been to the Israeli embassy and, as a lesbian woman, I was told how fantastic Israel is on gay rights. Israel is good on LGBT rights, but the point of human rights is that they are universal. Palestinians have the same rights as Israelis under international law—or at least they should have, but they do not at present. No matter how important it is to have a state of Israel—it is important—and no matter how much of a good friend Israel might be to the United Kingdom, it is imperative that we, as democrats and people who believe in the rule of law, speak the truth and do not let the Israeli Government get away with distortion and alternative facts when it comes to the rule of law.

I have very little time left, but I want to ask two questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who done so much work in this area, did not get to mention. First, will the Minister give us a timetable for the United Kingdom's recognition of the state of Palestine? Secondly, what will the British Government do to support the groups within the state of Israel that are striving to achieve peace?

3.7 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The settlements are illegal—that must be central to any talks. Several Members have suggested that direct negotiations should take place, but I question whether that is feasible. There is no trust whatsoever between the two parties, and the talks would be unequal, which is something that the Israelis acknowledge as they hold many of the trump cards.

What has been the UK's contribution to the peace process? I am disappointed by the Prime Minister's position on John Kerry's speech—it was a depressing

volte-face. It was particularly confusing given that the Foreign Secretary had said about the Paris conference that his intention was to be “reinforcing our message”. Of course, the Government attended that conference as an observer, so unless our message is that we have nothing to say, it is hard to see how the Government were in a position to reinforce their message. The Liberal Democrats, of course, support a two-state solution, and we believe that part of the way in which it will be achieved is through international co-operation such as the Paris conference. As John Kerry underlined, some unilateral actions also need to be taken. We want the Palestinians to clamp down on violence and its glorification, but the Israelis must also act unilaterally. Unfortunately, we have seen only negative action from the Israelis so far.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): We can perhaps understand the issue of unilateral action and the significance of settlements best if we ask ourselves a simple question. Can my right hon. Friend imagine any sustainable solution as long as the settlements exist?

**Tom Brake:** Indeed. I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I am sorry that he will not have an opportunity to make a longer contribution.

The land regularisation Bill is a good example of a counter-productive initiative, as is the expansion in area C. I hope that we will hear from the Minister not the carefully scripted speech that has been written for him, but what concrete actions he will take, because the Government's toned-down press releases have made no difference whatsoever. Umm al-Hiran has been demolished, notwithstanding any contributions the UK Government might have made.

It is clear that while the illegal settlements and their expansion are not the only obstacle to the peace process, every expansion and every attempt to legitimise their illegality is rightly seen as a slap in the face for the Palestinians and a demonstration of bad faith by the Israeli Government. Of course, any instance of Palestinian-initiated violence against Israel is clearly also seen as a demonstration of bad faith. The fact is that each illegal settlement expansion strengthens Israel's hand and makes a two-state solution, which many senior Israeli politicians clearly dismiss, increasingly impossible.

Ministers say that Palestinian recognition will be appropriate at a time when it will have most impact. That time is now. If Ministers wait any longer, Palestinian recognition will be pointless, as a one-state solution will have been imposed.

3.10 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): As other Members have been declaring interests, may I say that I spent two weeks last Easter with Medical Aid for Palestinians as a breast surgeon working in East Jerusalem, as well as working and teaching in Gaza? As many hon. Members know, in 1981 and 1982, I worked for 18 months as a surgeon in Gaza, so I still know the place quite well. I echo the comment by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) about Israeli doctors treating people from all communities. That is true, but often we could not get patients to Israeli doctors in Hadassah hospital because of curfews. I had patients who died in ambulances because of curfews. I had a 10-year-old boy



[Dr Philippa Whitford]

turned back at Erez for us to try to work out how to get him through the night, even though we did not have the equipment.

Having worked there at the start of the Oslo accord, I was really depressed when I was there last Easter to see that, a quarter of a century on, we are further from peace than we were that morning. By the end of the day of the Madrid peace conference, despite the violence that had happened on the day, I saw young men with olive branches on armoured cars. They believed that their lives were going to change. A quarter of a century later, the international community has let them down.

Some 1.8 million people live in the tiny strip of Gaza. It is becoming unviable. It is pouring sewage into the sea and the water is undrinkable. It will be unviable by the mid-2020s. The west bank is being put in the same situation by the expansion of settlements. It is not just the settlements, but the walls that separate people from their farmland or sources of water. It is settler roads that people are not allowed to cross even to get to their olive groves or water sources.

What is the vision for the west bank? Is it that Palestinians will simply live on reservations, as happened to native Americans centuries ago? What is the vision for the outcome that even the Israeli Government want? The only thing we have is international law, and if we do not stick to that, we will have no position of right for other people who do the wrong thing. It has been said that international players should not be involved—that it should just be the Palestinians and Israelis—but that is a totally unbalanced conversation. Northern Ireland had the UK Government, the Irish Government and the American Government to bring the peace process to success, and we need to be involved.

Everyone has said that they believe in a two-state solution, so how bizarre is it that we recognise only one of those states? If we do not take action to avoid profit from settlements and annexation by concrete, we will be answerable.

3.13 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): As joint vice chair of the all-party group on human rights, I approach today's debates with human rights at the forefront of my mind. My party supports the EU position of a two-state solution and encourages Israel and Palestine to reach a sustainable negotiated settlement under international law. There can be no justification for any impediment to progress in a peace process, such as indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel or the continued expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories. Israel's settlements in the territories have been established in clear violation of law.

The United Nations Human Rights Council commissioned an independent fact-finding mission to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The 2013 report stated that

"the impact of settlements on the human rights of the Palestinians is manifested in various forms and ways."

The illegal settlements critically interfere with the ability of the Palestinian people to exercise their fundamental right to self-determination, and it is not just the settlements. The associated infrastructure built on expropriated Palestinian land also has a substantial impact.

Time and again, the SNP has called on the UK Government to use their influence to help to revitalise the peace process and to find a way to break through the political deadlock. The Minister has a keen personal interest in the area. Will the UK Government recognise the state of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, affirming the equal rights of both peoples to live in sovereign, independent and secure states? The situation worsens in the territory and, as it does, the likelihood of a peaceful resolution fades. The time is right for the UK to recognise Palestine and its right to self-determination. The UK has not only a moral duty but a legal duty not to recognise, aid or assist Israel's illegal settlements and associated infrastructure because they impede Palestinians in exercising their fundamental right to self-determination. Please, such action has to be taken. A tougher stance needs to be taken today. I hope that the Minister will take on board all the views that have been expressed.

3.16 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I am well known as a friend of Israel, and the premise of a friend is that they are honest, open and truthful. With that in mind, there must be fairness for all, and I fear that UNSCR 2334 adversely affects the Jewish right to fairness.

I believe in democracy and the democratic right of those who are voted into power by a majority. We all know that the settlements and, indeed, peace in the middle east are complex issues. As someone who hails from Northern Ireland and has been involved in the peace process, I have lived through my own share of complex issues. Appeasement cannot be the answer for Israel and Palestine; working together is the only answer, and that is hard to do in the current situation. Trust me, I speak from experience.

It is clear that Jewish leaders have negotiated on this land as a way of trying to bring about some semblance of peace for Palestinians and Jews alike. Much like the situation in Northern Ireland, some people see negotiation as demanding things their way or no way, and that if their demands are not granted, they will go back to violence.

I have a very real fear that we are pushing Israel into a place where it does not want to be and where we do not want it to be. I can well remember the six-day war. As a child, I remember seeing Israeli women and children on the streets defending their historical homeland. That resonated with me over the years as I watched the strife in Northern Ireland. I do not wish to see Israel again pushed into a place where its options are restricted. The heart of the Israeli people is simple. They wish to be allowed to return home in peace. There is no doubt in my mind that the Jews have a historical right, and we should play a role that helps the process, saves lives and that perhaps allows children to grow up without distrusting other people.

I fully understand the concern that the UNESCO vote seems to disregard Jewish heritage in Jerusalem, and we seem to be going through a similar issue in relation to Northern Ireland's history. We want peace in the middle east, but it must be fair. There can never be peace without recognising that the Wailing Wall and the Temple Mount are Jewish holy sites that predate other sites. The Israelis have a right to access those places, and

access must underpin the negotiations, not the presumption that the Jews are the ones to blame. The Jews want to live in peace on their own historical land. The motion in no way recognises that, which is why I cannot support it.

There can be peace in the middle east, but only through encouragement, not division. Let us start by sending the right message: Israel is a friend of this nation and we will do the right thing by it.

**Mr Speaker:** We will now have three Front-Bench winding-up speeches of no more than eight minutes each, followed by a brief conclusion from the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne).

3.18 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate all the hon. Members who worked to secure this debate and the many hon. Members who have spoken. I recognise the passion on display throughout the debate on this complex and sensitive issue, on which we all agree that nobody has a monopoly of wisdom. We heard “Ode to Joy” both last night and at business questions, and it includes the line, “Alle Menschen werden Brüder”. All people will become brethren only if we allow joy and freedom to reign, which is an important consideration.

The Scottish Government and the Scottish National party position has firmly and consistently been that peace in the region depends on there being two secure, stable and prosperous states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side. Israel and Palestine should be encouraged to reach a sustainable negotiated settlement, under international law, that has as its foundation mutual recognition and a determination to co-exist peacefully. We have consistently condemned obstacles to progress in the peace process, whether they are indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel or the continued expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories.

Many Members have spoken of their personal experiences. In October, I had the privilege of visiting the Holy Land in a personal capacity, as part of the archdiocese of Glasgow’s annual pilgrimage. Although focus was on visits to sites associated with the Christian gospel and scripture, it was impossible not to be aware of the tensions and the legacy and impact of the ongoing conflict. It is worth stressing, however, that the journey itself was safe and secure. If anything, it brought home to me the massive potential for the economies of both Israel and Palestine if a peaceful settlement can be reached. The landscape is beautiful and dramatic, steeped in history, and the climate ought to make the region a holidaymaker’s dream.

Nevertheless, we did pass through the border wall between Bethlehem and Jerusalem several times—as the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) said, Christmas carols are never quite the same again after one has done that—and I saw young Palestinians stopped and subjected to lengthy security searches. I pay tribute to the ongoing ecumenical accompaniment programme of the World Council of Churches—co-ordinated in the UK by the Quakers—which witnesses and monitors incidents at the checkpoints. We could see settlements under construction, alongside approach roads and land connections with Palestinian towns and villages, and it is not hard to see how they threaten the contiguity of the Palestinian state. We saw parched lands and

dusty streets on one side of the wall and manicured lawns and fountains on the other side. That is unjust from any perspective: in a land of such plenty, nobody should need to go hungry or thirsty. We have heard powerful testimony today about the impact of the conflict across the communities in both Israel and Palestine.

The motion and the debate have focused on UN Security Council resolution 2334, which is something of a milestone and should be welcomed as a demonstration of the potential role to be played by the United Nations. For more than 70 years, the UN has brought countries together to work for peace and security, development and human rights, and it must be supported to continue and step up its mission. The resolution makes clear that the settlements have no legal validity and, indeed, constitute a flagrant violation under international law. That surely remains the case, even in the light of the legislation passed by the Knesset to give retrospective legitimacy to the settlements. As the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, there is no political consensus in Israel on that law.

The new law is a provocative and disappointing gesture, but the response must be a redoubling of diplomatic efforts. The UN Security Council resolution does not compel Israel to concede any of its own sovereign territory, nor does it preclude any future territorial modifications with the Palestinians. What it did was to reconfirm the long-established and consistent point of international law that settlements are illegal and should stop. The destruction of Palestinian villages, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) spoke powerfully, must also stop. I have heard from my constituents, powerfully and loudly, about their concern about that practice and its effect on communities.

The debate has raised several questions for the Minister. To his credit, he is one of the Ministers who does a good job of responding to the points Members make, even if we do not always agree with his responses. It would be helpful to hear from him what representations have been made to the Government of Israel about the recent legislation. Are they satisfied that the discussions our Prime Minister had with Prime Minister Netanyahu were sufficient, or is there an opportunity to go further? What steps are the Government taking to ensure that the UK adheres to the UN Security Council’s demand that, in their international relations, states distinguish between Israel and the occupied territories? Will the Minister guarantee that, after it leaves the EU, the UK will continue to make that kind of diplomatic differentiation? Does he agree that the UK should not be trading with illegal settlements?

As has been said repeatedly, a peaceful solution must be based on mutual respect and recognition on both sides. That applies not only to the people of the states of Israel and Palestine, but to their supporters and allies in the international community. Under no circumstances are attacks or abuse on the Jewish people, or any kind of manifestation of anti-Semitism, acceptable; anti-Semitism should be named as such and condemned. That also applies to violence and extremism in any form, whether directed at Palestinian, Israeli, Jewish or Muslim communities.

The Scottish Government, in line with other Governments in Europe and the EU itself, does not advocate a policy of boycotting Israel. Nevertheless, we

[Patrick Grady]

in the SNP are clear that trade and investment in illegal settlements should be discouraged, and the Scottish Government have published procurement guidance to reflect that position.

I mentioned my visit to the Holy Land, which gave me a new appreciation for the deep history and spirituality of the people and places there. Never have I felt more keenly or more urgently the words of the psalm:

“For the peace of Jerusalem pray:

‘Peace be to your homes!

May peace reign in your walls,

And in your palaces, peace!’”

3.24 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I thank Members on both sides of the House for securing this debate? People watching us from the Public Gallery will see the House at its best when it comes to such debates. Many Members were very well informed indeed. I was expecting excellent speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and from the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), but if I could pick one favourite speech it would be that of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) who spoke passionately, articulately and without notes, and I commend her for that. It may be that other people watching the debate will have other favourites, but her speech was excellent. In the time that I have available, I will not try to summarise all the contributions.

The carefully drafted motion represents a consensus shared across the House. I know that there are many differences, and we have heard them today, but, actually, what unites us is so much more than that which divides us on this. It is important that we speak clearly and loudly about settlements.

Clearly, this is an important anniversary year, and the debate is very timely. When we look at the great sweep of history, from the six-day war and its aftermath to the UN partition plan and all the way back to Balfour, it is quite clear that, in many ways and in context, we seem to have come to a halt. The past few years have been very dark and very depressing with very little movement. I fear that we have been slipping backwards, and that a two-state solution is moving further and further away from us.

Clearly, settlements are a major part of the problem, but we must recognise them for what they are: they are a roadblock to peace and a violation of international law. At the same time, we cannot pretend that this conflict can be reduced to that one issue alone, as that is simply not the case. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) put it so well, there must be an unequivocal end to violence and incitement on both sides. In these dark and difficult times, the question is what do we do? Do we give up hope? Do we walk away?

We must be honest that the road ahead is very hard. My question is this: have the Government decided that, what with Brexit, the crisis in the NHS, the collapse in social care, the challenge of the Trump presidency and wars over the middle east, continuing to be involved in such a bitter and long-standing dispute is just one challenge too many? In many ways, that was the message

that Ministers sent to the Paris conference last month when 36 countries sent a Foreign Minister, but not the United Kingdom. Our presence there was downgraded to observer status and we declined to join the communiqué, which really did not make any sense, because the objectives of the conference and the content of the communiqué were so closely aligned to the sentiments expressed in UN Security Council resolution 2334, which, I am told, the UK had a key role in drafting last December. It is as if we have been blowing hot and cold. What is going on? Are the Government losing their nerve?

The Government’s official explanation was that they chose not to attend because no Israeli or Palestinian representatives were present, but that does not make sense, because the Paris conference was not some kind of quixotic attempt to bypass the need for bilateral negotiations, but an attempt to affirm support for them. As the lengthy list of multilateral initiatives in UN Security Council resolution 2334 showed, the international community has always had a role to play in helping to facilitate bilateral talks.

For Labour, as internationalists, friends of Israel and friends of the Palestinians, that understanding is crucial. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), who was shadow Minister for the middle east, said a few years ago:

“We have made it very clear that we will always work with partners multilaterally to advance the two-state solution agenda.”—[*Official Report*, 13 October 2014; Vol. 586, c. 95.]

I hope that the Minister will explain why this Government appear to lack the same co-operative spirit—or at least they lack it sometimes.

Whatever the official reason, I am afraid that the clear subtext to the decision on Paris was the election of President Trump in the United States. Many have suggested that his election was bad news for the peace process and that we should give up hope. I can understand why. We just need to consider the words of Naftali Bennett, one of the most influential Members of Netanyahu’s Cabinet. Following the election of Donald Trump, he said:

“The era of a Palestinian state is over.”

Mr Bennett’s regulation Bill seeks to legalise the construction of settlements on privately owned land retrospectively and it should be condemned.

The fact is that a one-state solution would not enjoy the support of the people of Israel or the majority of the people of Palestine. By following the settler agenda, the Israeli Government are not acting in the interests of the people of the region, and certainly not in the interests of the people of Israel. A single state, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river can be one of two things: it can either be Jewish, or it can be democratic. As the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) so rightly said, it cannot be both.

As friends of Israel and friends of Palestine, there is no time for the UK to sit on the side lines. Of course I understand why the regulation Bill was pushed forward at this particular time. After all, the man who has just taken office as the President of the United States has expressed some unorthodox views, to put it mildly. He has made statements in favour of more settlements, and he is in favour of moving his embassy to Jerusalem and opposed to multilateral talks. The man he has appointed as America’s ambassador to Israel has said that

“a two-state solution is not a priority”.



Many of us worry that this rhetoric is divisive, but we have heard positive words from Mr Trump at times. He said, for example, that he

“would love to be able to be the one that made peace with Israel and the Palestinians”,

and that he has “reason to believe” that he can do that. I think we should choose to take him at his word. The difficulty is that I am far from convinced that he knows exactly how to do that. That is where we come in.

The expertise of the Foreign Office and the advice we can give the Americans in these circumstances are important. It is incumbent on us, as we wish for a two-state solution, to do everything we can to push for a path to peace. For the Government, that means making the case to Washington and Tel Aviv, and convincing them that a two-state solution is still both achievable and necessary. I hope that the Minister can assure us that his Government remain committed to a two-state solution, and opposed to anything that stands in the way of that.

I am deeply disappointed that the Government continue to fail to recognise the Palestinian state. Now is the time. I ask the Minister to comment on that. What thought have the Government put into how settlement goods could be separated from other Israeli goods, as many people do not wish to buy settlement goods? Are the Government doing any further work on that? How can we persuade British companies not to invest in settlement areas? Most importantly, I hope that when President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu visit London later this year, our Prime Minister will have the courage to set out those views in no uncertain terms. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

3.31 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** This important debate has been constructive, informative and, at times, passionate. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) and others who have brought it to the House. Following your guidance, Mr Speaker, I have just eight minutes to respond. I hope the Backbench Business Committee recognises how many people wanted to speak in this debate and I hope that we have a further opportunity for debate in which I have more time to respond. I will do my best, as I always do, to write to hon. Members if I do not cover their points today.

The focus of today’s debate is Israeli settlements, but may I begin, as others have, by firmly underlining our deep friendship with Israel, its people and its absolute right to exist and defend itself? Israel is a democratic state in a difficult neighbourhood. In the year in which we mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour declaration, which underlines our shared history, we continue to have an interest—as a nation, an ally, a regional partner and a permanent member of the UN Security Council—in understanding the challenges faced by the region, including securing a two-state solution, which we continue to support, and the issue of illegal settlements, which we are discussing today.

**Crispin Blunt:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will not because I have only a short amount of time.

The debate has focused on a number of themes, which I will try to cover to my best ability. The first was the importance of a two-state solution, which, as others have said, is the only way to secure a just and lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. We must all continue to work for that, no matter how big the challenges. The objective has been repeated not only by us and American Presidents, but by successive Israeli Prime Ministers and the international community. The objective has also been confirmed through a series of UN Security Council resolutions and other agreements through the Oslo accords, the Madrid discussions and the Camp David talks. To be clear: the solution cannot be imposed on the Israelis or the Palestinians, but the international community has an important role to play.

Although important, the matter of settlements is not the only issue but one of a number. The immediate removal of settlements would not immediately lead to peace. Trends on the ground, including violence, terrorism and incitement, as well as settlement expansion, are seemingly leading to a steady drift from peace and making the prospect of a two-state solution look very much impossible. It is in no one’s interests to see that drift towards a one-state solution. It is not in Israel’s long-term interests; it is not in the Palestinians’ interests; and it is not in the region’s interests.

Specifically on settlements, if we look at the map, we can see that there are now around 600,000 people living in about 140 settlements built since 1967. We can see that the west bank is being divided into three, with Jenin and Nablus in the north; Ramallah in the middle, broken by the Ariel finger; and area E1 separating Ramallah and Bethlehem from the Hebron conurbations. So the concept of a contiguous Palestinian state is being eroded, and that is a huge concern. The west bank is now a complex network of checkpoints, which is broken up, as has been said, and that makes it difficult for people to move and to enjoy a normal life.

Since 2011, Israel has approved only three urban development plans in area C. We want this to change, and we encourage Israel, as per the Oslo accords, to transfer land from area C to area B, and from area B to area A—area A, of course, is where the Palestinians have control and authority over their own security arrangements and economic prospects.

UN Security Council resolution 2334 was mentioned by a number of hon. Members. It should come as no surprise that we voted in favour of it in December, because we have long supported the two-state solution and the notion of Israel as the Jewish homeland. We should recognise what the resolution actually said. It proposed three important and balanced steps to support peace in the region, including calls for both parties to prevent the incitement of acts of violence, to build and create conditions for peace and to work together to allow credible negotiations to start. Of course, it is based on historical resolutions 242, from November 1967, and 181, which goes back to 1947.

The regularisation Bill has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members. A new and dangerous threshold was crossed with that Bill. I am pleased to see that the vote on it was very close—it was 60 to 52—and the Israeli Attorney General has made it clear that he will not support it if it goes to appeal, which I think it will. That is good, because he sees it as constitutionally unviable, and I hope that that message is heard loud and clear.

[Mr Ellwood]

I am running out of time, but I will do my best to cover the remaining points. On the recognition of Palestine, we need the Palestinians to do more to prevent the incitement of violence. President Abbas condemns certain aspects of it, but we are still seeing schools and squares being named after terrorists. These are not the confidence-building measures we need see. There is no relationship with Hamas at all. Those confidence-building measures are the steps that will allow us to move forward, so that there can be a recognition in the long term of the state of Palestine, but they are not there yet. The younger generation has given up on its own leadership, choosing instead to try to take a fast track to paradise by grabbing a knife and killing an Israeli soldier, and that is a terrible state of affairs to be in.

The British Government continue to believe that the only way to a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is the two-state solution, but there are a number of obstacles to peace, including settlements and continued violence and incitement. We remain committed to working closely with our international partners, including the new US Administration, to promote an environment conducive to peace. We continue to support both parties to take steps towards a negotiated settlement that brings peace, security and prosperity to Israelis and Palestinians.

Everyone has the right to call somewhere their home. Everyone has the right to be safe in that home. And no one should live in fear of their neighbours. We strongly believe that the middle east peace process is the best way forward to deliver these hopes. The question is whether we want a new generation of Israelis and Palestinians nurturing the seeds of hate or moving to a place of lasting friendship.

3.39 pm

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** My fear is that a sufficient number of Israeli politicians have drawn precisely the opposite conclusion to John Kerry and believe that they can indeed build towards the exclusion of a Palestinian state and yet withhold civil rights within Israel on the grounds that the Palestinians must seek those civil rights in Jordan or in sub-state Bantustans. This is the 50th year of the occupation, so I am grateful to the bishops, fresh from their visit to the region, who, in their communiqué, quote Leviticus, chapter 25, verse 10: “You will declare this fiftieth year to be sacred and you will proclaim the liberation of all the country’s inhabitants.”

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House reaffirms its support for the negotiation of a lasting peace between two sovereign states of Israel and Palestine, both of which must be viable and contiguous within secure and internationally recognised borders; calls on the Government to take an active role in facilitating a resumption of international talks to achieve this; welcomes UN Security Council Resolution 2334 adopted on 23 December 2016; and further calls on the government of Israel immediately to halt the planning and construction of residential settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which is both contrary to international law and undermines the prospects for the contiguity and viability of the state of Palestine.

## Football Association Governance

3.40 pm

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has no confidence in the ability of the Football Association (FA) to comply fully with its duties as a governing body, as the current governance structures of the FA make it impossible for the organisation to reform itself; and calls on the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to reform the governance of the FA.

A former Minister said when addressing the subject of FA reform:

“We are making progress, albeit slowly.”—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1969; Vol. 788, c. 570.]

That was Denis Howell speaking in 1969 in a debate on the Chester report, commissioned in 1966, which looked at the governance of football in England. Since that time, there have been numerous reviews of the governance and necessary reform of the Football Association. There was the Burns review of 2005. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee published two football governance reports, one in 2011 and another in 2013, setting out a series of detailed measures where we believed that the governance of football needed to improve dramatically. A former sports Minister, Hugh Robertson, said that he was going to prepare a Bill to legislate to reform the Football Association if it refused to deliver the necessary reforms. He described football as the “worst-governed” sport in Britain.

The Government are consulting on their sports governance code, which will apply to all national governing bodies of sport. This debate falls a few weeks before the talks between the Government and the FA will conclude. Some people may therefore suggest that this debate is a few weeks early; others may say that it is 50 years too late. We have been talking about this issue for a very long time.

Some people have questioned whether it is the responsibility of Parliament to seek to legislate on a private matter like football and sport, but I think it is the right of the national Parliament of this country to take a view on the administration and welfare of our national game, as we have sought to do, because this is a matter that the people we represent care greatly about.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): It is important—I speak as an MP for the home of the English premier league champions, Leicester, the city of diversity—that Parliament sends out a message on diversity. A quarter of all professional footballers are black, yet only 17 of the 92 top clubs have an ethnic minority person in a senior coaching role. Although the FA has committed £1.4 million to addressing diversity, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important in a debate like this that we send out the message that diversity should be an important part of any reform?

**Damian Collins:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point. I will come on to deal with the issue of diversity. Some would say that if the FA Council itself was a more diverse body that more truly reflected the modern world and the modern game, more progress would be made on supporting diversity, including encouraging and supporting more former players from minority ethnic backgrounds into coaching, and through the coaching system into the management of professional clubs. We would all want to see that.

Our constituents who are supporters of their clubs make continual representations about the effect of bad governance on the teams that they love—teams that have been driven into administration through financial mismanagement.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I am not going to rehearse all the arguments about Coventry City football club, but there should be some form of regulation. After all, the Football League is the only organisation that I know of that does not have certain rules in a way that relates to Parliament. Would the hon. Gentleman consider having Coventry's owners, Sisu, in front of his Committee to find out exactly what is going on? There are all sorts of problems at Coventry—as I said, I am not going to rehearse them—and we really now have to get to the bottom of this.

**Damian Collins:** The hon. Gentleman has been a doughty champion of the fans of Coventry City football club and the people of Coventry regarding the maladministration of their club. It is tragic that a club that was in the top flight for so long has been run into the ground as it has been. The football administrators have stood back and watched that happen, and it cannot be allowed to continue. I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) has been acting as an intermediary, and I support him in his work. The Committee has spoken about that issue strongly in the past, and it may do so in the future. We speak up for supporters whose clubs are being run into the ground.

As a parent, I see what some grassroots football facilities are like, and we have had representations about that. At this time of the year, too many boys and girls are playing on heavily waterlogged pitches and at training grounds or in parks where there are no changing facilities and no amenities at all. They look at the great wealth within the game and ask how that can be true. Although we welcome the fact that the FA facilities fund invests £22 million—a lot of money for a lot of sports—in facilities, that is a tiny amount of money in football. Twenty-two million pounds would not buy a quarter share in Paul Pogba. Given the huge wealth that exists in football, we all believe it could do a lot more.

Financial scandals have affected the game, and we are concerned that they have not been properly investigated. Lord Stevens led a review into allegations of scandals and misappropriated payments in the football transfer market, and he was unable to sign off on 17 of the transfers that he investigated to say that no suspicious payments had been made. Some of those transfers then involved a future England manager. People will ask, “Why aren't these things being properly investigated? What is wrong with the administration of financial conduct and ethics in football?”

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): As a person of an undeniable ethnicity and gender, and probably not in the first flush of my youth, I am reluctant to intervene when people who fit into those categories are being so widely criticised. However, four years ago a report considered the football creditors rule, which seems to me one of the absolutely rotten things at the heart of British football. Has the hon. Gentleman or any of his colleagues—particularly the Minister—received any indication that the FA is taking the matter seriously? Even though it might cause short-term pain, the long-term gain for the game would be immeasurable.

**Damian Collins:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. I have long believed that the creditors rule should be abolished. It means that when a club is insolvent, it has to pay all its football creditors, but the other creditors—the local community and the businesses it works with—do not get any money. I believe that that rule should have been abolished. The chairman of the FA said when he was chairman of the Football League that no moral argument could be made in favour of the creditors rule, but nevertheless it stands. I welcome the fact that progress has been made in putting a greater obligation on clubs to settle with non-football creditors on much better terms than was the case a few years ago, but I would like that to go further.

Football receives, as do other sports, a considerable amount of funding from the public purse, and we in Parliament are right to take an interest in how public money is spent on our national game. In the brief time that I have, I want to set out how and why I believe the FA needs to be reformed.

The FA Council—effectively, the Parliament of football—should represent football across the community, but it is not representative of modern society and the people who play the game. Of its 122 members, 92 are over the age of 60 and 12 are over the age of 80. There are eight women, and there are four people from minority ethnic backgrounds, so there are more men over 80 on the FA Council than there are women. That is not sustainable, and it does not reflect modern society. Although some on the FA Council understand the need for change, some do not. Barry Taylor, a life vice-president of the FA and life president of Barnsley, said in a letter to his colleagues on the FA Council that it “would be great” to have more women involved, “but not just for its own sake”.

Hearing that, I do not think that he has any serious commitment to the idea of more women on the council, or that he even understands why it is necessary.

The FA Council is an important body because it has power over youth football and women's football, and it is an important influence on the game. The FA board needs to be stronger and more independent—a more executive body. Only one of its 12 members is a woman, and there are only two independent directors. The last three chairmen of the FA—one of them, Lord Triesman, is sitting in the Gallery—have written to the Select Committee to say that reform is necessary to strengthen the board and ensure that the balance of power is held by the independent directors on the board. That was also a recommendation in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report. Reform is needed to give the FA the power to resist powerful forces and vested interests in the game, particularly the power and strength of the Premier League.

The primary job of the Premier League is to promote its competition, and it does so brilliantly all around the world. However, it exerts an enormous influence over football, because of the vast amount of money it raises and the funds it puts back into the game. We need a strong Premier League—that is good for football—but we need a strong national governing body of football that is ultimately responsible for many of the sporting and ethical decisions that football has to take.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a really important point. This is not just about who sits on which boards, but where the



[Mr Clive Betts]

money is and the power that it exercises. Does he think there is room for a further look at the whole issue of the power and money of the Premier League, and what governance changes could be brought in to get more control over it for the good of the game as a whole?

**Damian Collins:** The Select Committee recommended that the FA board should have a 6:4 ratio in favour of the FA executive and independent directors, so that their voice is stronger than that of any other component parts, including the Premier League. I think that is a necessary reform.

In closing—I could speak for a lot longer, but I want other Members to have the chance to make their own speeches—it is necessary to reform the structure of the FA board to make the FA more independent and give it the power to act. We have been calling for that for years, and the Select Committee has called for it in previous reports. We now believe that legislation is the only way in which that can be delivered. That was the recommendation of the last three chairmen of the FA to the Select Committee, who said that the FA cannot reform itself—turkeys will not vote for Christmas—so there has to be external pressure and action through legislation to achieve it. In this debate, I am asking the Government, if they are unsuccessful in getting the FA to reform, to prepare a Bill to introduce during the next Session of Parliament, following the Queen's Speech, to deliver the reform the FA so badly needs.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, colleagues, but I am afraid we will have to start with a limit on Back-Bench speeches of four minutes.

3.51 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): I speak in today's debate as one of the Members representing Bradford who has, in recent months, been deeply involved in working to save my home city's most historical sporting club. Many Members will know this proud institution—the world-renowned Bradford Bulls rugby football league club. I am pleased that after many months of campaigning, the Bradford Bulls have risen anew from administration and liquidation. I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing the club well under its new ownership.

I recognise that the Bradford Bulls are not a member of the Football Association, but of another governing body, the Rugby Football League. However, I believe most hon. Members would agree that, as a country, we face a crisis of governance not only in football, but across many of our cherished sports. Much of what has been and will be said in the Chamber this afternoon is relevant not just to football, but right across sport. Through the events of recent months in my constituency, I have learned much about governance, the role of governing bodies and, I am afraid, the weaknesses in the rules and regulations in British sporting life.

Bradford is of course home to Bradford City and Bradford Park Avenue—the latter is in my constituency—and I dare to suggest that these clubs are good role models. They are the sort of clubs the FA should be encouraging others to emulate. Bradford City has had

its fair share of difficulties down the years, and the club knows all too well the trauma associated with entering administration. It has learned the hard way, as so many football clubs have done. Today, however, the club operates within its means, and financial security is the foundation of its ambition, not the first thing to be sacrificed in the search for glory. In addition, it maintains a policy of financial openness with its supporters, and it is right to do so. That strengthens the bond between the club and its fans and local community, and it ensures that everyone feels part of a common endeavour. Bradford City has been rewarded with increasing support.

In non-league football, Bradford Park Avenue has worked with Supporters Direct to move from a private ownership model to become a community benefit society. I am very pleased to be watching them play this coming Saturday. I am also looking forward to becoming a member of Bradford Park Avenue community football club at half time. Club members commit to many great objectives, but the one I am struck by is the commitment to provide sporting facilities and opportunities to all. I hope the FA will support and applaud clubs at this level of the footballing pyramid to develop the sort of approach that Bradford Park Avenue is taking to engage with its local communities. If this type of approach is strongly reflected in the plans that the FA will present to the Government in the spring, I will be heartened.

As a country, we deserve strong, representative and accountable governance in the governing bodies of all our sports. Today's debate will identify a whole raft of failings in the governance of the Football Association. What is more shocking is not that the governance of the FA is in need of fundamental reform—that is a settled point—but that the FA leadership have been so grossly ineffective in introducing reforms in the face of criticism from the cross-party Culture, Media and Sport Committee. At best they are dragging their feet; at worst they are wilfully failing to act.

As the governing body of a major British sport, the FA is arguably above all else a public institution, even if it is a private registered company. As public institutions, governing bodies receive public funding, and they have the honour and privilege of having under their leadership the regulation and oversight of British sporting life. It is only right that we hold them to high standards.

Strong accountability is critical, not only for the sake of strong governance, but because a sports governing body has an important role in agreeing, overseeing and enforcing its rules. Sport is competitive on the field and in a business sense. The search for success and the drive to achieve and excel at the highest possible level can often mean that lines become blurred.

3.55 pm

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). In a previous life, I reported on both Bradford City and their run in the Intertoto cup—we had a trip to see Zenit Saint Petersburg—and the Bradford Bulls in their successful time, with grand final wins, world club challenges and Challenge cups. I welcome her passion for the sporting clubs in the great city of Bradford.

I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I must also declare that, as a Huddersfield Town fan, I am delighted that my team is

still in the FA cup, but slightly perplexed that the television companies have not picked our mouth-watering fifth round tie at home to Manchester City for live broadcast. Perhaps they will cover us in the quarter finals, when we might be playing Sutton United.

I must also put on record my thanks to the FA's delivery partner, the Football Foundation, which has invested almost £600,000-worth of grants in my Colne Valley constituency. That includes £340,000 to Hepworth United for a new changing pavilion, and a grant of £53,000 for Honley cricket club and Honley junior football club for the refurbishment and extension of existing changing pavilion facilities. I was involved in both bids and supported both community projects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Chairman, covered much of the ground. I want to focus on the fans. I am very lucky to support a club with a wonderful owner who is a genuine fan, Dean Hoyle. He has introduced many wonderful initiatives at my club, including season tickets for just £179. On Boxing day, two parents and two kids could see Huddersfield Town play for just £12—we won as well. The Huddersfield Town Foundation provides thousands of healthy breakfast clubs at schools, and the “Keep It Up” campaign of fans has organised bike rides that have raised more than £1 million for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and the Town Academy.

Not all fans are so lucky. Blackpool, Blackburn Rovers and Coventry fans will testify to that. That is why we need reform.

**Damian Collins:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be more representation from supporters groups on the FA Council?

**Jason McCartney:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend has probably read my next comment. I back the Football Supporters Federation recommendations, which include a minimum of five supporters' representatives on the FA Council and, more crucially, a supporter representative on the board. Hopefully, that supporter representation could help to increase the diversity of the top decision-making levels in English football.

As we have heard, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, of which I am a member, has been looking at FA governance for many years. I welcome some of Greg Clarke's early comments—he took over as chairman of the FA last August following his successful six-year spell at the Football League. The Committee report of 2011 highlighted key concerns that, over the years, have got worse. Arguably, the most worrying thing is the disproportionate influence exerted by the Premier League over the FA owing to its wealth, but other concerns are the increased lack of clarity on the ownership of clubs and, as I have just said, the lack of progress in getting supporters more influence in their clubs. As the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, another concern is the lack of women and black and minority ethnic representation not only on FA boards and committees, but in coaching roles. I must declare my involvement in a small FA committee working at St George's Park on increasing BAME representation in coaching at football clubs. A lot more needs to be done.

I want a successful England football team. I want it to give us the feel-good factor that the Olympics and Paralympics have given us. Just as the lottery millions

have been well distributed to nurture talent, participation and medal success, it is important that the FA should be able to do the same for football with some of the Premier League's billions. Club ownership, safe standing, Twenty's Plenty, kick-off times, disabled access and tackling homophobia are all issues that need to be addressed by a reformed FA. With more supporter input, I hope that will now happen.

I hope that this debate will show that we are serious about reform. The Government are serious about reform, the DCMS Committee is serious about reform and the fans are serious about reform. It is now time for the FA's executive board and the council to crack on and deliver those reforms.

4 pm

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) on securing the debate. I welcome this opportunity to try to influence the Minister before she concludes her discussions with the FA on its reform.

I accept that the FA needs reform. It has proven itself to be extraordinarily weak at times—as the letter from its previous three chairmen and two chief executives said, it has been unable to wield any power over the influence of the Premier League and the Football League—but we have to be clear about what we are trying to achieve. Many of the problems we are highlighting are not caused by the unwieldy construction of the council, but the weak and feeble nature of the FA board.

What do we want the FA to achieve? In England, there is one artificial grass pitch for every 42,000 people; in Germany, there is one for every 22,000 people. In England, there is one coach per 38,000 people; in Germany, there is one per 11,000 people and in Spain one per 3,000. Since 1992, when the Premier League came into being, Germany has won the European championship and the World cup, and Spain has won the World cup and the European championship twice. The council is not at fault for the lack of investment. The enormous wealth that has come into this country has not been reflected in investment in grassroots football, or the coaches and facilities that will develop our game. When we look at reform of the FA, we have to be clear about what we want to achieve.

It is not acceptable for there to be an ancient body such as the FA Council, which has representatives from the Army, Cambridge university, independent schools, Oxford university, the Air Force and the Royal Navy. The historic construction of this organisation clearly needs reform. I favour the Football Supporters' Federation's recommendations. We should have fans' representatives on the board of the FA. The time has also come for fans' reps to be on the boards of football clubs. They are an early warning system for problems that exist in our game. It is the fans we turn to when we look to save clubs that fall into difficulties. They are of the communities from which those clubs have sprung.

We have to be clear in our aims. Who are we seeking to empower? What problems are we seeking to solve? It is wrong to just say that any reconstruction of the FA will be the right thing to do. The FA board, as currently constructed, is clearly too weak to deal with the English Football League and the Premier League. The people on the council stood up to clubs that wanted to change

[Clive Efford]

their colours against the will of the fans. They stood up to clubs that wanted to move grounds and change grounds' names.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a really powerful case. To pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), I accept that this is not just a question of structure; it is also one of power, and empowering fans to have some say has to be part of the way forward.

**Clive Efford:** Absolutely. Many fans, for instance, want to see the FA have more influence over the number of home-grown players developed in our leagues. The number is woefully inadequate. Far too many of these prêt-à-porter players are imported because there is so much wealth knocking about in the Premier League; rather than develop and take a chance on a youngster, clubs buy someone off the peg and bring them in. We do not impose the rules that are there to ensure that those players contribute and add to the game. Many fans would like to see an FA that can deal with that kind of issue, and I do not see how just changing the council will make a difference.

I support the idea that there should be more independence on the board. However, I have another concern, which I will finish on. Right across sport, people from a small gene pool move about different sports and become involved in governing bodies. We need to look beyond that group of people for some real independence at the top of our national game—in other sports as well, but particularly in football.

4.6 pm

**Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): Four minutes! Let me be clear at the outset that I want the FA to succeed. I want to be able to hold them up as an example of good—indeed, exemplary—governance across this country and beyond. I am not saying that everything that the FA does is wrong; it does many good things, which I will touch on in the time available.

The wording of the motion is strong and robust, and although it challenges the FA in the strongest terms, in many ways it echoes the frustration felt by football fans in High Peak and beyond who have written to me and to colleagues. I was going to talk at great length about my history as a football supporter, but we do not have time—I am too old.

As a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I too received the letter from the three previous FA chairmen, an ex-chief executive and a previous executive director. Collectively they delivered a withering view of the intransigence of the FA and its inability to change its governance. Those men have worked within the FA: they seem to have become disillusioned and frustrated by that intransigence and have just walked away. In their words, the FA's decision-making structure has become

“arcane and convoluted leading to a lack of clarity about the role and purpose of these structures.”

They also claim that there are examples of “short-termism” and “vested interests”, with veiled and unveiled references to the FA's relationship with the Premier League.

The letter reeks of all these senior figures' frustration at their inability to get the FA to reform. As they say, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee concluded in 2011 and 2013—before my time as a member of that Committee, but when the current sports Minister was one—that the FA did need reform, yet it has not been done. It is right that we have tabled the motion for debate, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), the Chairman of the Committee, for leading it, and to the Select Committee for having proposed it to the Backbench Business Committee.

I do not deny that the FA does good work, such as the good community work it does through the Football Foundation. We have benefited from significant funds across the High Peak, not least for the new changing rooms for Tintwistle Athletic at a cost of £300,000 to £400,000. I acknowledge that. The FA also acknowledges that there is need for governance reform, as the present chairman, Greg Clarke, said in his statement published on Tuesday evening.

I respect and have a lot of faith in Mr Clarke. He is combative in his defence of the FA, and I do not blame him. He says that the FA has a set of proposals to present to the Minister for her approval and I am interested to hear what she is looking for from those. However, as a fervent football supporter, I hope that Mr Clarke can resolve the matter without our having to get too heavily involved. I urge him to do so and to do so quickly.

Football is the people's game. In recent years, as we have heard, it has had a huge influx of cash, with players earning eye-watering amounts of money, but it is still a game with 22 men—or indeed, women—kicking a football about, trying to get it into the opposition's net. The FA is the organisation that oversees that, and it has all this growth in the football family to deal with.

On the 20th of this month, it will be the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Premier League—the juggernaut that has precipitated much of this growth. The FA has to deal with that, but the relationship has been called into question. The game is seemingly in rude health, so why is it being called into question today? There is support for the lower league. Glossop North End, in my constituency, has been in two FA Vase finals, in 2009 and 2015. In 2015, they could not sell the tickets direct and get a commission, as they did in 2009; it was done by the FA. Glossop North End got less money. It lowered the prices, but the gates were less, because of the FA. Sam Allardyce managed England for 67 days and one game, and allegedly walked away with £1 million.

Such things are destroying people's faith in football. The FA is the governing body. It needs to address this matter, and quickly, starting with governance.

4.10 pm

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): Football clubs are

“more than simply private assets”.

Those are the words of the Vote Football campaign, and they have been echoed by many Blackpool football club supporters who have written to me ahead of this debate. Blackpool has always had a proud football history, from the club's famous 1953 FA cup final, with Stanley Matthews, to Jimmy Armfield, recognised



internationally for his abilities as a footballer and as a commentator, and all the way through to the Cinderella story of our promotion to the premiership in 2010—a very proud moment in our history. I was privileged, along with tens of thousands of people on the promenade, to welcome home the team.

Sadly, however, the strife over the past four years between the club's fans and owners is only too well known. It has resulted in thousands of people choosing to boycott Bloomfield Road in protest at the club's running. That is why, incidentally, I backed the Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) introduced that would have given accredited groups such as the Blackpool supporters' trust greater powers and influence over how their club was run. It is a melancholy set of circumstances, not simply for Blackpool, but elsewhere, particularly in the north-west, with the issues at Blackburn and, some would argue, Bolton. That, again, is why I signed early-day motion 611, along with other Members from the north-west.

It is interesting to note what the Blackpool supporters' trust said about the governance issues. The unprecedented pursuit of Blackpool football club supporters by the management through the civil courts on matters such as defamation, libel and trespass has made the situation far more difficult. As Steve Rowland, the chair of the supporters' trust, has said, the FA was supposed to be the overarching guardian of the association football game in this country, but too often it has become simply a money-spinning business venture. If this debate can take us forward, serious attention can be focused on reform, the fairer representation of supporters' rights in the way clubs are run, and more stringent rules in respect of the roles of owners and directors. That is why I also support the plans to have supporter representation on the executive board and council.

These are issues that ordinary football fans in Blackpool feel strongly about. I want to quote from two letters I have had. One reads, "They're not just businesses like any other, but company law makes no such distinction, and the FA rules no longer do either". My constituent Stephen Bullen, who strongly believes that clubs should be run in the best interests of the community, wrote:

"The FA has committed to investing £260 million in grassroots football over a four-year period, but...is this really enough?"

Is it getting to the grassroots? Supporters have nothing but the game's health at heart, but they are dramatically under-represented on the FA board, as we have heard. As the Football Supporters Federation has said,

"if the governance is to be truly reflective and representative of the sport...needs to value the role of 'consumers' and other less traditional 'producers'."

I know that the sports Minister is anxious to move and frustrated at the lack of progress. I have talked to her about the problems of Blackpool football club, the chasm that has opened between the owners and the fans, and how this illustrates starkly why there needs to be a much more proactive system of governance. She responded with a set of proposals, but they are not far-reaching enough, not least in their failure to contemplate Government action. Why has it taken her Department almost six years to act? The letter from the five FA executives sums it up, and that is why it is reasonable to concur with the conclusions of the Chairman of the

Culture, Media and Sport Committee. As someone once said, the prospect of hanging concentrates the mind wonderfully. I wish the new chief executive well in his attempts to prove the Committee wrong, but there will be no harm in pressing the motion in the meantime.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but it must be three minutes each from now on.

4.14 pm

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): A foreign observer could be forgiven for looking at football in this country and wondering whether it can really be the case that the sport is poorly governed. After all, we have the most watched, admired and financially lucrative top division in world football, with attendances of over 90% every week at premier league stadiums.

As has already been pointed out, the Football Association performs some great work throughout the country, investing more than £65 million a year in grassroots football. My constituency is one of many that benefit from that. I think we should also acknowledge the great work that Greg Clarke is doing in trying to reform the FA. As a relatively new chairman, he has given some extremely encouraging signals about the direction in which he would like to take it in the coming years.

The problem is this. For many years, we have heard again and again from the FA that it recognises the deficiencies and challenges and intends to change—in fact, it has been talking about reform for 50 years—but change has not come, and time is running out. I have a great deal of respect for Greg Clarke, but I also have a feeling that his hands are tied, and that a sense of institutional inertia pervades the governance of football in this country.

In 2011 and 2013 the Culture, Media and Sport Committee produced reports on football governance and finance, and it has also highlighted problems with diversity.

**Stephen Pound:** I think it important that the hon. Gentleman is mentioning the good aspects of the FA. It is easy for us to criticise, and heaven knows the FA deserves criticism, but every day of the week work is being done by bodies such as the Fixtures Committee and the Disciplinary Commission, which oversees referees. A vast amount of tedious, boring administrative work is undertaken by the FA, and without it none of us would be able to enjoy the game that we love.

**Nigel Huddleston:** Indeed. As I think is clear from the tone of all the speeches that we have heard so far, we do not want to hinder the progress of football; we want to help. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that a great deal of work is being done.

Some commentators have fairly and reasonably pointed out that it is a bit rich for a largely "pale, male and stale" Select Committee to lecture another organisation about diversity. It is true that there are more gentlemen called Nigel on our Committee than there are women. In fairness, however, I would respectfully point out that we deal every day with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and speak to a female parliamentary

[Nigel Huddleston]

private secretary, who reports to a female sport Minister, who reports to a female Secretary of State, who reports to a female Prime Minister. I might add that our last two reports were on, respectively, access to stadiums for disabled people and homophobia in sport.

It seems to me that the main purpose of the motion is to fire a warning shot across the bows of the FA. On its own, it will not change the structure of football governance—we all know that—but the fact that we are having this debate will hopefully communicate, in no uncertain terms, just how important the issue is to MPs and our constituents, and will instil a sense of urgency within the FA board and council. I am well aware that the FA is coming up with its own proposals for reform, and I look forward to seeing them.

As I have said, my intention is not to hinder Greg Clarke and the FA's own reform agenda, but to help. As a Tory MP, I am not greatly enthusiastic about Governments' becoming involved in anything unless they absolutely have to, but let us be clear: if we have to intervene, we will. Talk without action is no longer an option.

4.18 pm

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): A major scandal is emerging of private companies running 16-to-18 football and other sports academies funded by the Department for Education. For example, a company called Gemeg, which operates in my area, is behind a football academy serving Worksop Town football club. We and the public were told that the company was run by Doncaster College, but when it collapsed, we found that it had been run by the College of West Anglia, which is 100 miles away. West Anglia claims that the operation took place for five months in Nottingham, but I can find no evidence that anyone ever went to Nottingham for five months. That involves 23 different students, and what I do know is that zero qualified in English and zero qualified in maths, and that the FA's safeguarding policies in schools were being breached. I make this offer to the FA. We in my area, with the local authority, the schools and the local FA, can provide best practice in safeguarding in football. At present, the systems at the grassroots are shambolic and must be overhauled.

Let me put in a word in defence for the FA. It was the FA that took action on Anelka and the quenelle. It is the FA that has taken action on racism. It is not the FA that is responsible for football clubs not employing black and Asian coaches. It is the premier league clubs, the Football League clubs, and the league clubs in other structures that is failing to do so. The FA actually has been training people up. It is the FA's work that has led to the huge development of women's football.

The insidious power not least of the Premier League, but also of the other professional clubs, in running the FA for their own purposes is a fundamental weakness. We should not forget people such as Jack Tarr in my area, who drew up the fixtures that made sure that Bassetlaw has more kids playing football in schools than anywhere else in Britain. We are asking the FA and the Government to give us some of this resource. If only the equivalent of the taxpayers' bill for policing just one premier league fixture of major consequence could be put into facilities in my area. Some 600 people watched Retford versus Worksop last Saturday, but

neither club owns its own ground and neither club can get investment to develop its facilities. Give us the chance to do that. These problems run deep in football, where the money runs very thick.

On safeguarding, we should use the money as leverage. We should use it as leverage on diversity and on bringing women and girls into football. We are delivering the youths; give us the chance to develop the sport. That is the real challenge for the FA. Of course its structure is outdated, but let us have some of that money from the professional game and clubs into the grassroots.

4.21 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

I grew up in the shadow of Wembley stadium and its twin towers. I followed my local football club and I ran a Sunday football team. I am, of course, a fanatical football fan—my father helped to set up "Match of the Day", so I think that I can speak as a true football fanatic. I am a season ticket holder—home and away—for my favourite team.

The reality is that football in this country is in the hands of the Premier League. It has the power and the finance, and it has sold out to the TV companies, which now dictate when games are played, which days they are played on and what time they kick off. Of course, huge amounts come in as a result.

At the same time, as we have heard, grassroots football across this country is not seeing that money transferred down to it, because premier league clubs are keeping the money to themselves. The FA does not do its job in representing grassroots football, in controlling the game, and in making sure that the money flows from the top to the bottom so that we can develop the young players—male and female—right across this country who we all want to see playing the beautiful game positively and in the right way. Without a change, we face stagnation in our national game and our England football team being unable to win trophies—we would all like to see them win trophies—and we do not have the quality of football that we would all want.

Wembley stadium has always been our national stadium. It is the shrine to which we go for FA cup finals, League cup finals, internationals and other events. However, it is now being transformed, with not only Tottenham playing there for a year, but Chelsea potentially playing its home matches there for three years. That, to me, is wrong, because it is an abuse of our national stadium, which should be kept for those all-important matches that fans want to see. Turning it into a stadium for clubs to use for perhaps four years or longer, is an abuse of our national stadium and we should not allow it. However, the FA, which is in charge of that national stadium, seems to be an amateur in dealing with high finance in football. We should encourage professionalism in the FA, as well as reform to it so that the situation does not get ever worse. I will conclude with this statement: it is important that the FA understands that if it does not transform itself, Government action will be required.

4.24 pm

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I should like to put on record, as chair of the all-party groups on football and on football clubs, the fact that both groups get administrative support from the Football Association.

Back in 2005, we had the Burns report, and I met Lord Burns shortly after the report was published and had discussions with him. Over the years, I have also talked about these matters to my colleague, Richard Caborn, because the report was commissioned jointly by the Government and the Football Association. The tragedy is that it has taken an awfully long time to do very little over the years. The FA council is virtually unreformed since Lord Burns talked about it.

Some progress has been made with the FA board, which now has an independent chair and two independent members, but more needs to be done. The suggestion about having a fans' representative on the board should be taken seriously. The problem with the FA board, of course, is that it does not really run football as a whole. There is so much power because of the money coming from the Premier League, and the professional game board still has powers that have been taken away from the FA board as a whole. If we are going to have a reformed FA board, it has to be responsible for the whole of football. It has to be the governing body for every aspect of the game. That is something that we absolutely want to see.

I do not want to belittle the Premier League. It is a magnificent global brand and it has done some good things, including introducing the £30 maximum charge for away fans, but in the end, we still have a situation in which an ordinary premier league player can earn more in two months than Sheffield City Council spends on its junior football pitches in a whole year. There is something wrong with that; it shows that the balance of money in the game is all wrong. A reformed board has to be able to divert more money into grassroots football and address the cliff edge between the premier league and the English Football League.

Also, we should not belittle everything that the FA does. It has done some great things. For example, it has done really well on the women's game at local and professional levels, and it has tackled racism. It needs to do more on homophobia, but it has started to do so. Mr Speaker, you hosted a reception at which Graeme Le Saux spoke about what the FA was doing to tackle homophobia. It is also starting to address the issue of black and minority ethnic coaches, and the English Football league has taken important initiatives in that regard as well. We want the Premier League to do more.

In Sheffield, we run the largest junior football league in Europe, under the banner of the Sheffield and Hallamshire County Football Association. The FA is now pioneering the Parklife project, which has two schemes in Sheffield, one of which is in my constituency at the Isobel Bowler sports ground. Spades are now in the ground and the scheme will be up and running in a few months' time. The FA is taking really good initiatives such as those, despite all the problems, but there has been too much delay in regard to its governance. In Greg Clarke, we have someone who wants to see reform and we ought to back him now. However, we must make it clear that if the FA and other footballing bodies do not back him, we will ask the Government to act instead.

4.27 pm

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I do not want to go down the route of legislation to reform football governance, but the FA is supping in the last

chance saloon—it has been doing so for a long time. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) knows a lot about this subject, and I agree with what he says about Greg Clarke. Having met him, I can see that he is a man who has clarity of purpose and determination, and who wants to make a difference. He has asked for time in which to do that, and we should be willing to give him some, but only a little.

**Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's comments, does he acknowledge that the Vote Football fan campaign, the Football Supporters Federation, individual supporters, grassroots organisations, parliamentarians and constituents all want change and reform? Why does he think that the FA believes otherwise? Is it not now so out of touch that there is a need for the external imposition of change?

**Christian Matheson**: I do not think that Greg Clarke is out of touch or that he believes otherwise. He has clarity of purpose, but the structures are inflexible and unbudging.

On the one hand we have the juggernaut of the Premier League, as my fellow member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) has described it. The league is a success and it attracts the best players. Speaking of which, was it not magnificent to be at Goodison on Saturday to see Romelu Lukaku score four, Mr Speaker? But I digress. The Select Committee was told in a letter that Premier League representatives

“regularly use their position on the FA Board”

and “their financial might” to “maintain their position”.

On the other side are the elderly gentlemen, the 25 life presidents on the FA council, whom my Committee Chairman, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), eloquently described earlier. They are known as the blazers, not to be confused with the Glazers, as any Manchester United fans in the Chamber will know. That description reminds me of Will Carling's famous description of the leadership of the Rugby Football Union in 1995 as “57 old farts”. That was a coarse term, Mr Speaker, but it seemed to move things on, and the RFU has since brought its governance up to date. There are arguments against the Premier League and the so-called blazers, but for me this is about the combination of both, so it is clear that legislation might be the only way of breaking the logjam of self-interest.

If I may digress slightly, there is one area on which I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). When the structures at the top are not right, the management below does not fall into place. For example, we know that the FA is failing to regulate both the power of football agents—I am told that the agent exam can be passed by an 11-year-old—and transfer negotiations, leaving the potential for a bung culture. The structures are not right, so the management and the enforcement below is not right.

The problems involving the great club of Coventry City and Sisu were mentioned earlier. Greg Clarke told the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that although there are fit and proper person tests for directors and officers, there is no test of whether someone actually has the ability to run a club, which is another example of management structures not being good enough. During the Select Committee session, I talked about the



[*Christian Matheson*]

tentacles of offshore ownership and untraceable money, which the FA is unable to manage. I also mentioned Vibrac Corporation, which used its base in the British Virgin Islands to loan millions of pounds to Everton, West Ham, Fulham, Reading and Southampton between 2011 and 2013 despite a lack of clarity about who actually owns it. A further problem is that the FA has little control over financial matters and appears to rely on little more than signed declarations from clubs or interested parties to say that they are fit and proper, which allows the FA to avoid responsibility. Good governance depends on the right structures at the top and on allowing the management to enforce rules that have been put in place correctly.

Greg Clarke is a good man who will fight hard to achieve his reforms. He has won friends in the amateur game by visiting every county FA in England, but he needs support and I am unsure whether he has that at the moment.

4.31 pm

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I will speak briefly, Mr Speaker.

**Stephen Pound:** Probably about Leicester.

**Keith Vaz:** I thank my hon. Friend. Leicester is the home of the English Premier League champions. My message today is one of support for the reform package that has been put forward, but I acknowledge the excellent work done over the past few years by the Chairman and other members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Of course the FA needs reform. Greg Clarke, whom I know personally, was present on the most recent occasion that I was at the King Power stadium and is a former chairman of Leicester City, and I believe that he is genuine in his desire to reform his organisation. He has made it clear that if the reforms do not go through, he will relinquish his position. Given the impressive contributions that we have heard from Members on both sides of the House, it is important that reform comes sooner rather than later, but I want to talk about the importance of diversity.

Some 25% of professional footballers happen to be of Afro-Caribbean origin, but just 17 of the 92 top clubs have a BAME coach in a senior position. When looking at how football has developed over the past few decades, it is important to acknowledge the lack of diversity. I understand that Mr Clarke wants the Government to back the proposals before they are implemented, and I hope that the package will include a recognition of the importance of diversity not just at club level but at the local level.

I am delighted that Leicester has local football teams that are developing the skills of young people whom I hope will go on not only to play for Leicester City at the King Power stadium to help us retain the premier league and beat Sevilla to win the champions league this season, but to build a foundation for the future. It is through schools and local football clubs that we find the players of the future. I hope that the Government recognise that the issues are serious, as I am sure the Minister for Sport does. I invite her to come to the King Power stadium before the end of the season to see

diversity in action not just through the players, but in the ownership and in how the club's management has developed.

4.34 pm

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): It has been 50 years of hurt in the English game and we are all suffering, but at least we are not Scotland.

It is not only all the issues that have been raised by hon. Members that appear to show a structure that is unfit for purpose. We have seen not just a sequence of managers but of chairmen who have not been credible or led the FA properly. It is time for root and branch reform of the organisation and some sense of the English game being managed for the benefit of all—those at the top and those at the bottom. I want to touch briefly on some of the problems, such as the coaching problems mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). There are all sorts of problems in coaching, and we have had the recent scandal. When we talk about root and branch reform, it cannot just be about the FA, the senior structures and the picking of the England manager—although they are dreadful at that—it must be about some of the other issues at the grassroots. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) mentioned the funding of grassroots football, and that must also be part of root and branch reform.

My area has three clubs, two of which are well run. One is Accrington Stanley, and I give a shout for Andy Holt, who must be the best chairman in the football league. The other is Burnley, which is well run, but I shall move on.

Many people in the Chamber and outside will be aware of the problems of my club, Blackburn Rovers, and how poorly it is run. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester also mentioned the involvement of agents in the game, which root and branch reform must address. Three or four years ago, we had Jerome Anderson, who I think must be agent 001, who went on the television saying he was working for Blackburn Rovers. He was acting as a purchaser and advising on players, he was also an agent providing players and his son was on the books at the time, alongside other players he represented. The FA said that was not a breach. Everyone looked at that and thought, "Hang on a minute, we've just had half an hour's rant from Jerome Anderson on Sky Sports." It was clearly wrong, and the FA did nothing about it. It brings the game into disrepute.

My final point is about the owners, and I think people know what I am going to say. When we talk about a fit and proper persons test, we talk about people who perhaps should not run football clubs for financial reasons. In the case of Blackburn Rovers, it is just sheer incompetence. There is only one UK director and they have no interest in the fans or the club.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not know whether the Minister will be able to be on her feet by 4.50, but that is what she would like, and I know she has a fair bit to say. We will see how we get on.

4.38 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in today's debate. The Chair of the Select Committee set

out a powerful case and I will not rehearse too many of the points that he made. We also had fantastic contributions from other hon. Members, with the exception perhaps of the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) who took the mick out of the Scottish game.

The motion is damning, and I have little sympathy for the FA as it was given early warning of the concerns of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. The first report outlining its concerns was published in 2011, and a follow-up report that stated that the football authorities had not done enough on governance reform was published in 2013. We are now, therefore, six years into the process and questions are rightly being asked about why enough has not been done to address the concerns that have been raised.

In a somewhat squeezed debate, I want to focus on the lack of diversity at the top of the FA and across the game in general. In doing so, I will primarily focus on the lack of women involved in the running of the game. The draft code of governance states that 30% of members who sit on a sports governing board should be female, and the FA fails miserably in that regard as only one woman sits on its 14-person board.

The issue does not only affect the English FA, as the Scottish Football Association also has room for improvement. Scotland goalkeeper Gemma Fay—a good St Johnstone fan like me—who has been capped more than 160 times, claims that women are not represented enough at board level and has called on the Scottish governing boards to make moves to diversify their board members.

A recent survey found that only three of 70 directors at Scotland's top football clubs are women, which proves that the imbalance exists in boardrooms right through the game. In fairness, the Scottish Football Association has been going through step-by-step reform over the past few years to become a fully representative and modern governing body. Following the McLeish report in 2010, the SFA has been going through an ongoing process of modernisation, which includes the creation of a new congress to replace the so-called blazers of the past with the first fully representative group of stakeholders.

The creation of the congress has meant that clubs and affiliates are now joined by recognised bodies such as Professional Footballers Association Scotland, the Scottish Managers and Coaches Association, the Scottish Senior Football Referees Association, the Scottish Football Writers Association and SportScotland. The congress deals with many issues, and its work includes looking at ways of increasing the numbers and influence of women in the game.

For a long time, and many moons ago, Maureen McGonigle, the founder of Scottish Women in Sport, was the only woman involved with the SFA at any senior level. She sat on the SFA non-professional game board and is the only woman to have received a long-service medal from the SFA council. She was the only woman on the council for 14 years, and casual sexism was rampant in those days. Maureen gives an example:

“One of the first dinners I went to was for the opening of the South Stand at Hampden. I was at a table with all of the Scottish FA council wives while my work colleagues were sitting elsewhere. Afterwards I wrote to Jim Farry”—

the then SFA chief executive—

“and said ‘I’m not a wife, I’m actually a worker.’ I then became the first woman to sit at a men’s table at one of the dinners.

To be fair, I was always treated well within the council but they never knew how to address me. It was always: ‘Good morning gentlemen ...and Maureen.’”

Despite the welcome progress that I have outlined, the SFA professional board still has no female members. It is fair to say that a dramatic increase in the pace of change is required.

It is also fair to say that two of the most impressive people currently operating in the Scottish game are women. A few weeks ago I attended a sports policy conference in Edinburgh, and we were lucky to hear from Ann Budge who, after leading a takeover of Hearts, has spearheaded a huge change in fortune for the Tynecastle club and was named Scottish Professional Football League chief executive officer of the year in 2016.

Meanwhile, the club's Edinburgh rival, Hibernian, has an inspirational chief executive in Leeann Dempster. I was lucky to be a guest of Leeann at Easter Road a few months ago, and she was eager to discuss a community programme on which the club has embarked. Most clubs these days have a community trust, some more effective than others, but GameChanger takes it to a different level by involving more than 100 partners from the public, private and third sectors, culminating in a public social partnership between the club, business and the national health service. It is about using Hibernian's assets to improve the lives and life chances of all in Edinburgh and the Lothians, not just Hibs fans. Leeann has strong opinions about the governance of the game, and she thinks that there are still not enough women involved, particularly at the decision-making level.

The FA has a slogan: “football for all.” It always talks about how sport should be for everyone, but how can that be the case when, at senior level, there is a glass ceiling for those who are not white and male? Furthermore, the FA chairman's recent comments on homophobia within the game, advising against players coming out, almost serve to highlight that point. The advice not to come out because the FA cannot protect those players is inherently wrong and is an abdication of leadership on a hugely important issue, undermining some of the FA's good work.

Instead of urging people to remain silent about their sexuality, the FA chairman should be doing all he can to ensure that football is a place for everyone. Anyone who dares to abuse a player because of their sexuality, ethnicity, religion or anything else is not welcome at football matches. Moreover, if a particular club has repeat offenders within its fan base, the club should be punished with larger fines and point deductions. That is the correct approach, and it underlines the faults within the FA.

The FA is a governing body, and it has a responsibility to clubs, players, managers and supporters to send out messages and to set the right standards for all those involved in the game. Football is massively important to all the home nations. It is our national game, and more than 12 million people play. It is woven into the very fabric of our society. Despite all that, football has to change and adapt to the modern environment in which it finds itself. This is not about the Government interfering in the affairs of the game; it is about ensuring that the FA meets its slogan about being a game for everyone. We need to open the boardroom to people from all backgrounds, and the time is long overdue for supporters and people from diverse backgrounds to be involved in the running of the national game.

4.44 pm

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): It is clear from the speeches made by Government and Opposition Members alike that football really is close to all our hearts. Like the Minister, I grew up playing football and, like us all, I am sure, as a fan I have gone through the highs and lows of watching my team throwing away a game in the final minutes or winning spectacularly on the world stage—although for that, I suppose it depends on which team one supports. In the spirit of diversity, I wish to put on record that I am very glad that both my friend the Minister and I are women.

The purpose of this debate is unfortunately not to discuss the highs and lows of football, but to debate confidence in the Football Association. Rigorous governance and the following of proper and due process is vital for governing bodies such as the FA, so that it can work properly and in the best interests of its players, coaches, match officials, stadium staff and fans. Rigorous governance allows us to build trust—trust not only of the governing body itself, but among those who make up the game.

With rigorous governance come positive outcomes: outcomes that ensure support at a grassroots level to increase the participation of women and girls in a sport that is currently dominated by the men's game, and outcomes that see diverse representation across all levels. Rigorous governance also ensures that governing bodies serve to the fullest extent all stakeholders, perhaps most importantly the supporters.

**Keith Vaz:** First, I congratulate my hon. Friend most warmly on her appointment as the shadow sports Minister. I refer to the Register of Members' Financial Interests in respect of Leicester City football club and myself.

My hon. Friend mentions diversity. Bearing in mind her discussions with the FA, does she believe that there should be a target for ethnic or gender representation, or would she leave it to the FA to come up with its own outcomes?

**Dr Allin-Khan:** That is a good question. I have met Greg Clarke and representatives from the FA on several occasions, and I do believe that Mr Clarke deeply understands the importance of diversity, at every level. I truly do believe he feels that. Putting in quotas would perhaps add some value, but we need to ensure that women and people from ethnic minority groups also feel empowered to apply for jobs, not only on the field but in the boardroom. It is also important that we have role models.

Like all governing bodies, the FA has duties, one of which is governing the game with integrity. It cannot fulfil its duty unless it has strong governance, and currently it is not performing well enough. That needs to change. There is no cushioning around this point: the FA must do more. In 2011, Lord Burns said that the FA Council, at 118 members, was too large; today, the council has 122 members. As we have already heard, the council is made up of only eight women and four representatives from black and minority ethnic groups.

Not only is diversity not in the heart of the FA; it is not in its body or, indeed, even in its soul. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) spoke of the importance of nurturing more home-grown talent. The FA has accepted those and other current failings,

but it must now move on from the criticisms and make a clear path forwards on to a road of good governance. If it does not, it will only have a detrimental effect on the game.

Despite all that, we must not sideline the hard work and determination of many within the FA. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made an excellent point about the work that has been undertaken to combat racism, and we must acknowledge as positives the aim to double female participation by 2030 and the Lionesses placing third in rankings of our country's favourite teams. Some £22 million a year is invested into the grassroots game, and with more flexibility being seen in the form of five-a-side and walking football, a larger proportion of the population has the opportunity to get involved. Those are not small steps; they are ambitious, and that should not be taken away from the FA.

Nevertheless, just as the Football Association has a duty, so do we in this Chamber. We have a duty to follow due process. A process has been laid before all national governing bodies, and it must be adhered to. If not, we will be moving the goalposts—as it were—and it will be us who ensure a detrimental effect on the game of football. I do not wish to do that.

All national governing bodies have been given until April this year to lay their plans before the Government and show their reforms. That is a timetable and a process that we must stick to. We cannot single out individual governing bodies. Parliament must live up to its duty. We cannot shift the goalpost for some, and leave them cemented in for others. Having said that, we must make the Football Association aware that this is its last opportunity. In an evidence session of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in December, the Minister stated that she believed that financial penalties—that of removing £30 million of funding to the FA as well as withholding support for a World cup bid—would be severe enough for the FA to take notice and make reforms. However, respectfully, I disagree. Further in the evidence session, the Minister stated that funding would still be given to the game of football, but through different means. This, therefore, does not have a significant effect on the game.

The hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) quoted life vice-president, Barry Taylor, who said that the governing body is rich enough to stand alone and that it should resist change that would see a more independent board and an end to the current council's structure. That makes it blatantly clear that funding cuts are not, and never will be, a driving factor for reform.

A World cup bid would also not be likely until 2030, which, therefore, provides no time-sensitive pressure on the FA to reform. After today's comments by the life vice-president, I ask the Minister whether she still stands by those comments.

Many in this House today have brought forward the concept of legislation, but that must be used as a last resort. It must be made known to the FA that legislation will, without doubt, be drawn up if, in April, plans presented to the Government are not of a sufficient nature and reform cannot be seen. Does the Minister agree that if, in April, the Football Association's plans are not sufficient, the only next step to take is legislation?



Will the Minister commit today that if, in April, the FA is unable to show significant progress towards levelling out the playing field when it comes to diversity on both the board and the council and subsequently not meeting the mandatory aspect of the governance code for “greater parity and greater diversity”, she will take action against the FA?

What I have wanted to highlight today is that we cannot, and should not, jump the gun. It is for that reason that, at this time, I cannot stand by a motion of no confidence. However, I will stand extremely firm in April. My message today is this: reform is necessary, and progress must be seen. If that is not the case, then the time for self-reform is up. We owe that to all those who participate now and those who will participate in the future.

4.51 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and members of the Select Committee for securing this Backbench Business debate this afternoon. Members have spoken with great passion and insight on a subject that we all should, and do, care deeply about. However, although this debate is important, it is, none the less, a few weeks premature for reasons that I shall explain in my speech.

We need to be careful that we do not tarnish the growth and success of English football because of concerns about governance at the FA. To do so would denigrate the hard work, dedication and commitment of the thousands of volunteers at grassroots level right up to the professionalism of the majority of coaches, players and clubs at elite level.

When I sat in front of the Select Committee recently—and indeed during this debate—Members were sceptical about the incentive to remove public funding from the FA if it did not comply with our governance reforms. That scepticism was reinforced this morning in an open letter from the FA’s life vice-president, Barry Taylor, to all 120 members of the council. He said:

“We have the money, we have the power. Let them stop the money. How did we manage to build Wembley and St George’s Park, I ask?”

The answer to Mr Taylor’s question is—with Government money. In fact, the Government bailed out the FA with £160 million of public money to build Wembley stadium. We gave it £6 million to help it complete St George’s Park. We gave Government guarantees for the 2018 World cup bid and a similar underwriting for staging the champions league finals at Wembley and the European championship semi-finals and final in 2020. Furthermore, tens of millions of pounds is given through Sport England to help the FA grow and sustain grassroots football in this country. Some £10 million is given each year to the Football Foundation charity that we partner with the FA and premier league, which has built and upgraded thousands of new grassroots sports facilities across the country. That is on top of the £30 million that the FA has had over the past four years to grow the game in other areas. Although Mr Taylor and others might not see the threat of removing public money as a serious one, they should just reflect that it is not just about the millions of pounds that they get from Sport England but all the other financial aspects as well.

Fortunately, the view of Mr Taylor is not that of the FA executive, for it knows that had it not been for Government support, hundreds of grassroots clubs would have disappeared. We would not have a national football stadium, or be able to host prestigious European matches. This Government, and previous Governments, intervened because we recognised the ambition that the FA had for football in this country, and Government share in the FA’s future ambitions. When it told us that good quality facilities and coaching were needed to support the grassroots and produce better players, we backed it, without hesitation, by committing a further £50 million over the course of this Parliament, which was over and above the figures that I have already mentioned, to its flagship Parklife project.

The Government’s intention is clear. We want to support the grassroots, amateur and professional game as a whole. In my discussions with the FA executive, its members tell me that they value their relationship with Government and that the vital public money they receive, directly or in partnership, is helping them to deliver important initiatives on the ground. However, that public money—money that, incidentally, many members of the public do not think a wealthy sport such as football should have—has to come with conditions.

The UK code of governance for sport, published last October, was not written specifically for the FA, but it is not exempt from it. The code will help to ensure that all sports governing bodies are moving in the right direction and are creating the most effective environment for their sports to thrive. It will protect public investment in sport by ensuring that transparency, controls and financial probity are a prerequisite for all organisations in receipt of public money. It challenges sports bodies to reflect on whether their current structures are effective. I genuinely do not think that we are asking sporting bodies to do more than what we would expect from good corporate governance. Frankly, what right do we have to criticise the governance of FIFA if the nation’s Football Association is not transparent in its own decision-making process? Good governance equals better decision making. Reform of the governance structures at the FA will undoubtedly permeate football at all levels.

We have heard today that the FA has lagged behind the times, that it is unrepresentative of the people who play and support the game, and that it is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to unlock the stranglehold of vested interests. I do not disagree with most of that sentiment. The FA concentrated its grassroots efforts on the traditional 11-a-side parks game. The result saw participation stagnate and, at certain times, decline. The FA was slow to recognise that people’s playing habits were changing along with their lifestyles. For too long, the FA failed to realise the true potential of women’s and girls’ football, nor what women can bring to the game off the pitch. But given that a leading member of the FA Council referred to a woman’s role in football as washing the kit while I—an FA qualified coach, manager of a girls’ team and, oh, Sports Minister—sat two seats away from him on a platform, it is little wonder there are so few women sitting in influential positions at the FA. Other areas of diversity remain a challenge for the FA, and I look forward to the Select Committee’s report on homophobia in sport, which I am sure will address the issue of how football could do more to support male gay players.

[Tracey Crouch]

Yesterday, Members saw the open letter that the chairman, Greg Clarke, sent to the council. He knows that by the end of March, before the code comes into effect, the FA should have in place an action plan agreed with Sport England that sets out what steps the FA is taking to become compliant with the code, and the timescale for achieving each target. He says that if it does not comply, he “will have failed” and he will resign. It is true; he will have failed. But that will be as a consequence of his own board and council failing him, not because the Government have set an unreasonable challenge of achieving good governance. I accept that the FA has not wholly delivered on this promise of reform in the past, but where we are today with the mandatory code is different from where we have been before. The code acts as a yardstick against which we can benchmark all our sports governing bodies.

We should be proud of what football has achieved, but we must also reflect on what else it can and needs to improve on. We can ensure that support goes into grassroots football without going through the FA. Only 30% of grassroots football is delivered through the FA. It is up to the FA if it wishes to play Russian roulette with public money. Given the debate we have had today and the number of representations received by me and other Members, I think it is fair to say that the FA will lose. In my opinion and the opinions of other colleagues, the FA's current model does not stand up to scrutiny. Reform is therefore required, and the governing body has every opportunity to bring that about itself.

Although I believe that today's vote of no confidence in the FA is six weeks' premature, it and other governing bodies should be fully aware that the clock is ticking fast, and that failure to reform will lead to not just the withdrawal of public money but further consideration of legislative, regulatory and financial options to bring about the changes needed. If we want better governance of football across the world, let it begin here.

**Mr Speaker:** If the hon. Gentleman wants 30 seconds, he can have them.

4.59 pm

**Damian Collins:** The message from this debate is absolutely clear: no change is no option. The debate on this issue has been running for too long, and the FA, to use a football analogy, is not only in extra time but at the end of extra time; it is in Fergie time and it is 1-0, down and if it does not pick up quickly and reform itself, reform will be delivered to it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has no confidence in the ability of the Football Association (FA) to comply fully with its duties as a governing body, as the current governance structures of the FA make it

impossible for the organisation to reform itself; and calls on the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to reform the governance of the FA.

## PETITIONS

### Changes to funding for 3 and 4 year olds in Walsall South

5 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): A petition in similar terms has been signed by 65 people.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Government's consultation paper (Early Years Funding: changes to funding for 3 and 4 year olds 11/08/16) outlined proposals that will leave nursery schools financially nonviable, forcing them to close; notes that this funding will not cover basic costs, let alone staffing with qualified teachers; and further notes that state nursery schools have very good outcomes with regard to closing the achievement gap and supporting children with special needs, and that state nursery schools are legally required to employ highly-qualified staff, who are proven to give young children the best opportunities for academic achievement and enabling social mobility.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to recognise the school status of State nursery schools and fund them accordingly.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002011]

### Closure of Cambuslang Jobcentre

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The petition of residents of Rutherglen and Hamilton West, in similar terms to those lodged by my colleagues yesterday and in respect of some morally outrageous plans, states:

“Declares that Department for Work and Pensions plans to close eight Jobcentres in the Glasgow area, including Cambuslang Jobcentre, will impact tens of thousands of people in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and Universal Credit, and that the consequences will be severely felt by some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people; have concerns that these closures will result in the poorest communities not being serviced by a Jobcentre and make it even harder for those seeking employment to get support, with people running a greater risk of falling foul of the UK Government's sanctions regime; and are further concerned that these plans will also impact Scottish workers who will be forced to relocate to other Jobcentres.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Government to halt any move to close Glasgow's Jobcentres and carry out a thorough Equality Impact Assessment and go through a full and proper consultation before making any decision on the future of the estate.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002013]

## Holocaust Memorial Museum

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christopher Pincher.)*

5.3 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The holocaust is one of the most difficult experiences in our history to commemorate in stone. For its sheer enormity and depravity, it defies adequate description, and transferring this into the built environment is all the more difficult. Architects across the world have attempted to tackle this task—in Israel, Paris, Washington, Ottawa and, perhaps most memorably, in Berlin, with Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

It is impossible sufficiently to convey the horrors of this great crime, but we have a duty not just to commemorate but to teach future generations about the holocaust. I will detail why Victoria Tower gardens are insufficient for this task, while pointing out that we have a very good solution available close by, at the Imperial War Museum.

There can be no better example of the twofold task of remembrance and education than the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, which I visited recently and was very moved by. The visitor can experience solemnity and silence in a hall of remembrance, where one can light a candle, say a prayer for the dead and reflect. But this memorial is also a museum, and it is very large, with a permanent collection of over 900 artefacts, 70 video monitors and four theatres showing eyewitness testimony and historic film footage.

On arrival, visitors are given identification cards giving the name and story of a single person, whether a victim or a survivor of the holocaust. On a journey through history, they learn about anti-Semitism, the Nazis' rise to power, the ghettos, discrimination, the frightening "final solution" decided around a conference table in Wannsee, and its implementation in Nazi-occupied Europe. The museum also teaches about the American response to the holocaust. It would be useful to detail Britain's reaction at the time, whether it be to the Kindertransport or the well-intentioned but disastrous decision to severely cap German-Jewish emigration to the British Mandate of Palestine—always bearing in mind that we were the only nation to fight Nazism from the very first to the very last day of the war; of that we shall always be proud. Knowledge is vital—indeed, fundamental—to remembrance. We must make sure that Britons know about the holocaust in order to recall this great crime, as well as to prevent future attempts to commit anything remotely similar.

The Washington experience is the one that we should seek to emulate in a UK national holocaust memorial, but when we consider the Victoria Tower gardens site we see it is completely unsuited to the role. The US museum receives 30 million visitors a year, and it is thought that the proposed memorial here in London will receive over 1 million visitors per year. In line with this educative function, I hope that such a place of remembrance would become a must-visit site for children on school visits to London. However, Victoria Tower gardens is already a well-trafficked area that suffers from severe congestion. The traffic and access pressure will overwhelm Millbank, where there is no parking, at a location not capable of accommodating such a volume

of people and vehicles, especially coaches. We want people to be able to visit a holocaust memorial museum uninhibited. We want crowds to experience this building, and so it is counter-intuitive to site it at a place that already suffers from congestion and does not have the capacity to deal with the number of people we hope will visit.

The abbey and Palace of Westminster are recognised by UNESCO as a world heritage site, and there is some danger, based on UNESCO's rules and recommendations, that such a large-scale project in Victoria Tower gardens might threaten that designation. I urge the Government, and Westminster City Council, to turn down the proposal for a learning centre in the gardens, not least because it conflicts with the council's monuments saturation zone. There are already 300 monuments in the City of Westminster. Last year, the council turned down an application by the Methodist Church to place a homeless Jesus—a bronze rough sleeper—outside Central hall because it conflicted with the monuments saturation zone.

We should also be worried about the precedent that this will set, not just for one of Britain's world heritage sites, but for our royal parks. Victoria Tower gardens is part of the royal parks, and if we allow a green space like this, even for such an unquestionably useful and justifiable purpose, to be built over, then other spaces under the care of the royal parks may suffer a similar fate. This small park, fringed with large trees, is the only oasis in this part of Westminster for hundreds of thousands of visitors, office workers and local residents every year.

The scale of the learning centre—there has been criticism of it in the architectural press—raises questions about the fate of the existing memorials in the park: the Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst memorial; Rodin's sculpture, "The Burghers of Calais"; and the fine Gothic memorial to the Victorian abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton. Will these three existing memorials be overshadowed? Local residents have no objection whatsoever to a memorial on the scale of the existing memorials; they are just worried about the scale of the underground learning centre.

In addition, the plans call for building downwards beneath the ground of the park at a riverside location. The area faces serious drainage problems already, and 50 properties were flooded from underneath after the rains of June 2016. We are talking about ancient marshland that has been built up across the centuries. Subterranean construction here may significantly disrupt the local water table.

Of course, the whole area used to be surrounded by the River Tyburn and its rivulets flowing into the Thames. This was the old Thorney Island. The Thorney Island Society, which looks after the local history and preservation of the area where we are now, has expressed its anxiety in a statement:

"The Society is obviously very concerned at the loss of this valuable small park, because it is very difficult to imagine that a project of this size and importance would not dominate the space and transform it from a tranquil local park to a busy civic space. We do not object in any way to the building of a memorial, but we feel that there are more appropriate sites, already proposed as well as not yet considered."

The society has urged people to sign the petition opposing the current proposal.



[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

Happily, there is a solution. The Imperial War Museum is spending £15 million on renovating and improving its permanent exhibition devoted to educating people about the holocaust. The museum sits in a location that would not suffer from increased traffic and that is already conducive to tour and school coaches. It is less than a mile away from the Palace of Westminster, so it is still located in the centre of the nation's capital. The museum's directors have been very welcoming of the idea of having the national holocaust memorial at hand there, and they have offered a site next to the museum. Far from glorifying war, the Imperial War Museum makes the opposite point—that war led to the hatred and destruction that made the holocaust possible.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case, and I am delighted to hear that he supports the principle of a holocaust education centre and beyond. Does he not agree that schoolchildren and other visitors to the Palace of Westminster could walk to the holocaust centre, and so they could combine their visits without having to travel by car or by coach? They could visit all the facilities in one go, rather than having to travel between them.

**Sir Edward Leigh**: That is a perfectly fair point, but I believe that because of the severely constrained site, there might be difficulties with the sheer number of visitors. I make the separate point that we are talking about a decant of Parliament, and many services may be based in Victoria Tower gardens. There are all sorts of other problems that I think my hon. Friend should consider, although I hear what he says. After all, we are talking about the Imperial War Museum, which is very close indeed.

Given the constraints of Victoria Tower gardens, the concept proposed for the site has already had to be scaled down from an entire learning campus to a few underground rooms. I say to my hon. Friend that it will not be like the Washington DC memorial; it will be much smaller. Why should we scale it down? We think it is really important, so we should make a proper memorial like the ones in Berlin and Washington. What the architects have proposed is simply insufficient to convey the enormity of the horrendous crime we are seeking to commemorate, and it fails in its scale to respect the dead whom we seek to remember.

We would be much wiser to take our example from the memorial museum in Washington, which is a proven exemplar when it comes to imprinting the importance of the holocaust upon the minds of future generations, and a place to preserve historical recollections, but also a place to remember the dead. Given the seriousness of what we are commemorating, we need to make sure that this is done properly.

To sum up, the Victoria Tower gardens site is too small for what is needed. Further development there would threaten a UNESCO world heritage site and set a dangerous precedent for green spaces in the care of the Royal Parks Agency. Meanwhile, just a short distance away, still in the very centre of London, we have a permanent exhibition already devoted to the study of and teaching about the holocaust. There is a chance for synergy; we can build on those connections and create an integrated experience based on the example that

works so well in Washington. This proposal, which is supported by me and many others, including the Imperial War Museum, will allow the United Kingdom to have a proper place to remember the holocaust and to educate future generations about this enormous crime.

5.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Percy)**: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who is my constituency neighbour, on securing this debate—he was quite right to do so in order to raise his concerns. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for making a contribution.

I need to begin by making it clear that the decision has already been taken to select this particular site, so I cannot go too far into the specifics, or rerun the arguments about which site has been selected for what reason. Before I respond to some of the specific complaints and issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough raised, it is important to reflect on why it is so vital for us as a nation—for all of us in the House and, indeed, the country—to build a holocaust memorial.

The holocaust may have reached its barbaric climax at Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz-Birkenau, but it started in the hearts of ordinary men and women. We have seen again the madness that can sweep through peoples and nations with the killings in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. Such killings shock our conscience, but they are at the awful extreme of a spectrum of ignorance and intolerance that we see every day—the bigotry that says another person is less than my equal, or less than a human being—and we cannot let those seeds of hate take root in our hearts.

That is why building the memorial is so important to our country. It is also why the new national memorial to the holocaust is to be located next to this place, the heart of democracy and of the values that suffered so terribly during the holocaust and in other events since. The accompanying educational centre will send out a powerful message about our values as a country. Together, we will stand up for the British values of tolerance and respect for others that I think are epitomised by this building and this Parliament. Together, we will educate every generation to fight hatred and prejudice in all its forms, and we will defend the hard-fought British liberty of freedom of religion and belief.

The plans to build a new holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower gardens have support not only from the Prime Minister, but from across the political spectrum, which is very important. The independent and cross-party UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation was set up to advise the Government on taking forward this work. The foundation's board includes Members from both sides of the House—my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) and the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond)—as well as distinguished Members of the other place and, of course, the Chief Rabbi. There are also representatives from a variety of fields who have given freely of their time to share their knowledge and understanding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough raised concerns about the siting of the memorial in Victoria Tower gardens. I hear his comments about museums and memorials in Washington DC and elsewhere,

but important as they are, this is a unique and specifically British memorial that should chime with our values. The decision to locate the memorial in Victoria Tower gardens followed an extensive search of more than 50 sites across London, but none was considered more prominent or appropriate than Victoria Tower gardens which, as I have said, is next to this building.

My hon. Friend asked whether the memorial might not be better placed at the Imperial War Museum. This site was explicitly considered among the 50 other sites by both the Holocaust Commission and the cross-party UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation. The promise that all parties made to our holocaust survivors was that we would create a striking and iconic memorial, and there is nowhere more striking and iconic than next to our Parliament in Westminster.

I can reassure my hon. Friend that careful consideration is being given to the impact of the memorial and the centre on the gardens. I showed him the proposed designs yesterday. They are very much outlines, but the selection of a final design will take place shortly. I assure him that preserving the park as a much-loved public amenity will be key in choosing the final design. I also assure him that residents and users of the park will be fully consulted—they are, and can already be, part of the process. As this moves to a planning application, they will be able to explain their views in the usual way. The designs have come from some of the world's best architects and artists. They will be considered shortly by the jury, who will be mindful of the need to maintain the integrity of the park.

I assure my hon. Friend and colleagues that we are consulting local residents, stakeholders, Royal Parks, Westminster City Council and Historic England to ensure that the current character of the gardens is maintained. We would like the memorial and learning centre to be a logical and harmonious addition to the space. If my hon. Friend looks at some of the proposed designs, he will see the various ways in which the designers believe that that can be achieved. I assure the House that, within the budget for building the memorial, funding will be dedicated to enhancing the appearance and usability of the gardens for local residents, people who visit the capital and local workers who, as my hon. Friend said, use the site very much.

Victoria Tower gardens is already a well loved and much visited park in London. My hon. Friend made a lot of comments about visitor numbers, but I do not

necessarily share his views about congestion. The experience of many of us who come from outside London is that people face congestion throughout the capital. I am not sure that one central London site is any more difficult to get to than another. Congestion is a problem throughout the capital and the situation might be just the same if one were trying to visit the Imperial War Museum. Many of the problems are with getting into central London in the first place.

We hope to encourage a wide range of people to visit the memorial—that is obviously a key part of the project. We envisage hundreds of thousands of people visiting the memorial to reflect, to remember the holocaust and to make use of the important learning centre. Visitors' arrival and exit at the site will be carefully considered and planned in consultation with Royal Parks and local residents.

We intend to continue to engage local residents at every step of the way, especially now that the shortlisted designs have been submitted. That will begin apace once a final designer is selected and we move towards a planning process and application, which should be towards the end of this year.

I invite colleagues on both sides of the House to look at the shortlisted designs. There are a range of designs, some of which are more interesting than others. While I have a favourite, I should not share it with the House because the process is still open. Anyone who looks at the designs will see that they would have different impacts on the gardens. We look forward to further feedback from members of the public about the final design.

I reiterate the importance of the new national holocaust memorial and learning centre. It will serve as a reminder of the depths of depravity to which a seemingly enlightened society can plunge if it abandons its democratic values, and of the importance of constant vigilance in protecting those values. There could be no more powerful or appropriate location for such a memorial than next to the mother of Parliaments and the place that has, throughout our history—it continues to do so—stood up for the democratic values of freedom and tolerance that we hold so dear, but that were so patently and appallingly absent during the holocaust.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.23 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Thursday 9 February 2017

[MR ANDREW TURNER *in the Chair*]

## Smart Metering: Electricity and Gas

[*Relevant documents: Sixth Report of the Science and Technology Committee, HC 161, and the Government response, HC 846.*]

1.30 pm

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock)  
(Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Sixth Report of the Science and Technology Committee, Evidence Check: Smart metering of electricity and gas, HC 161, and the Government response, HC 846.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. It is good to see some fellow Committee members here for what I am sure will be an interesting debate for us, and hopefully for the Minister and shadow Minister.

By way of background, the Government's smart metering implementation programme requires energy suppliers to offer smart electricity and gas meters to all homes and small businesses in Great Britain by 2020. The idea behind smart metering is that the meter communicates directly with the supplier using wireless technologies, removing the need for meter readings or estimated bills and allowing price information to be transmitted to the home. Through an in-home display, the customer can see in pounds and pence how much electricity or gas is being used, nearly in real time.

The smart meter roll-out is a major project, with total costs of nearly £11 billion and projected benefits of around £16 billion. Millions of people already have some experience of the roll-out of smart meters, and millions more will be offered one in the next few years. It should be no surprise, then, that the Select Committee on Science and Technology was not the first to look at smart metering. Colleagues on what was then the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change examined the beginnings of the smart meter roll-out in 2013 and again in 2015, and the Public Accounts Committee held an inquiry in 2014. Their work provided an excellent foundation for the Science and Technology Committee's scrutiny.

My Committee's report was published on 24 September 2016. It was the output of a short inquiry concentrated specifically on the evidence behind the smart metering policy, rather than on exploring the roll-out's progress from a value for money or project management perspective as other Committees had done. The inquiry took place under the direction of my predecessor as Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), to whom I am grateful for all her work in guiding the Committee so well before she was promoted to Government. We received the Government's response at the end of November, shortly after I became Chair.

This debate is timely. A few months after our report, the Government published an updated cost-benefit analysis of the smart meter roll-out that shed further light on

the issues explored by the Committee. We were pleased by the publication of that document, as it fulfilled our recommendation that an update to the 2014 figures should be provided. However, the analysis included some concerning figures and information that I am sure will feature prominently in this debate. In my remarks, I will focus on three of the report's recommendations in particular: first, the need to act with greater urgency to address some of the technical limitations of the early first-generation smart meters; secondly, the need for the Government to be clearer about the national benefits of smart metering, as opposed to those for the individual consumer; thirdly, the need for excellent consumer engagement to realise the benefits of smart metering before, during and after installation.

We learned during our inquiry that the roll-out began in 2013 with a foundation phase of smart meters built to a specification known as SMETS 1, if Members will excuse the ugly acronym. The latest quarterly figures from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy show that there are now more than 4 million such meters in homes across Britain. We are now moving towards the mass roll-out phase, which will use meters described as SMETS 2. However, SMETS 2 meters rely on the implementation of a piece of national infrastructure, the Data Communications Company, which has been delayed several times in going live.

During our inquiry, we heard that the early SMETS 1 meters had some unfortunate technical limitations. One relates to interoperability among suppliers: customers who switch their energy supplier after installation run the risk of losing the meters' smart functionality. Depending which supplier they switch from and to, the meter could revert to being a "dumb"—or, perhaps more kindly, a traditional—meter. Last year, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that more than 130,000 smart meters were now operating in dumb mode as a result of switching.

It appears that it might be technically possible to modify the early meters to work with the national communications infrastructure—the phrase is "adopt them into DCC"—to ensure that smart functionality is retained when the customer switches supplier. The DCC has been commissioned to undertake a feasibility project to assess the options, but at present, the Government merely have an ambition to sort it all out by 2020. The problem is that the scale of the task of adopting the early meters into the DCC is growing by the day.

As the Minister will know, the DCC finally went live in November, but the delays mean that suppliers will still be installing SMETS 1 meters for some time to come while the DCC undergoes testing. The latest cost-benefit analysis suggests that 8 million SMETS 1 meters will be installed in total during the roll-out, far more than the 5.4 million estimated during our inquiry and double the 4 million installed so far. In fact, the DCC estimates that there could be more than 10 million SMETS 1 meters, affecting more than 6 million households. From a consumer point of view, that means that 6 million households, or around one in five, will effectively have to choose between smart and switch. If they switch supplier to get a better deal, they risk losing smart functionality, but if they stay with a bad tariff, they get a better idea of what their bills will be and are more able to take action to reduce them.

I am sure that hon. Members will agree that it is a difficult choice. Those who wait for SMETS 2 can have it all, but until the problem is solved, those with

[Stephen Metcalfe]

SMETS 1 meters will be forced to choose. The most extreme scenario is the early adopter who received a meter in 2013 but must put up with the situation until 2020, or perhaps even longer if the Government's ambition is not met. I am sure that we would all agree that seven years of waiting for the full benefits of smart is a long time. I would not blame someone in that situation for being somewhat unimpressed with the roll-out.

Our report recommended timely action, not least because the problem was known at the very start of the programme. The Government's response to us was essentially that it is a work in progress, but we know that the scale of the problem has grown. In his remarks at the end of this debate, will the Minister address the need for greater urgency to prevent a poor experience for up to 6 million households? Moreover, will he consider setting a hard deadline by which suppliers must take necessary steps for their SMETS 1 meters to work with the DCC system?

The Government also told us that they had put in place protection

"to ensure consumers are appropriately informed that they may lose smart services".

Effectively, it is a condition of suppliers' licences that they provide that information at the point of installation, and when the supplier gains a customer through switching. However, in a Citizens Advice survey last year, just 3% of consumers said that they had received information about the limitations of SMETS 1 before installation and only 13% thought that their meter functionality would be affected if they switched. Is the Minister confident that customers are receiving information about the limitations of SMETS 1 and that they understand that information?

The second theme that I would like to explore is the need to better communicate the national benefits of smart metering. Put simply, one of the advantages of the communications link between the supplier and the meter is the scope for offering time-of-use tariffs. Some hon. Members may be familiar with the idea of economy 7 meters, which have a day rate and a night rate. Smart metering enables a concept that is broadly similar but much more flexible. Broadly speaking, if suppliers can incentivise customers to run their dishwashers while the sun is shining or their washing machines when the wind is blowing, they can take advantage of renewables without the network cost of having to store the electricity until it is needed. As a result, they may be able to avoid having to build a new fossil fuel plant. As we know, there is a problem with peak demand; if we can smooth out electricity use and lower the peak, we will not need quite so much fossil fuel capacity in the energy network to keep the lights on.

There is also an element of future-proofing. In coming years, we may all be driving electric vehicles. The first thing someone will do after coming home from work will be to begin charging the car so that it is ready for the morning commute the next day, which could mean a huge spike in demand in the early evening. Smart meters could pave the way for smart charging—charging in the sense of replenishing the battery—to balance the total demand on the network, and hence the price, against when cars need to be charged. They may not need to be charged straight away to get to 100% capacity by 8 o'clock the

following morning. Optimising when they are charged may mean being able to avoid having to fire up gas plants to deal with the evening surge in demand.

That is my very general description, with no numbers attached, of some of the national benefits of the smart metering project. The Committee concluded that, without a proper description,

"there is a risk that the project will become viewed solely as an inefficient way of helping consumers to make small savings on their energy bills."

When the Committee published its report, the estimated saving for the average dual fuel bill through smart metering or through the behaviour change that it prompts was £26 per year by 2020—about 50p per week. That is the national figure, although I accept that for some people the saving may be considerably greater because they have used the installation of a smart meter to change their own habits at home. The latest assessment downgrades that benefit to only £11 per year by 2020. Surely that is a harder sell to a consumer if the Government cannot explain why smart metering is good for the country too and why it is a valuable investment for the future.

The Committee was clear that the national benefits of smart metering need to be communicated

"alongside emphasising savings for individual customers."

Unfortunately, the Government dismissed that recommendation on the basis that successful smart metering projects in other countries

"have messages focussed on benefits that are immediately relevant to consumers and not complicated by references to longer-term benefits."

Will the Minister confirm whether that is still the Government's view?

We asked the Government to provide us with more information on the national benefits. Disappointingly, that information took the form of a list of three items, which were,

"reduced need for new generation capacity to be built...more efficient use of existing generation assets... and...avoided investment in transmission and distribution networks."

I think we would all agree that there is a distinct lack of specifics there. Perhaps we are wrong and the national benefits are not of any significance, but if so, the analysis needs a rethink.

If hon. Members had time last week, which I suspect they did not, they may have watched an ITV documentary on smart meters, which concluded that

"the only ones who are sure to benefit are the power companies themselves—and to millions of hard-pressed bill payers, that will sound all too familiar."

Is it any wonder that reporters are focusing on the tensions between benefits to the individual and to the suppliers, when there appears to have been little attempt to communicate the much wider national benefits of smart metering? If the project is considered only in such simple terms, the Government may have millions of annoyed consumers on their hands. I ask the Minister to address in his remarks the need to explain the national benefit as well as the saving to individual households of £11 a year.

The final theme that I would like to highlight from the report is the need for consumer engagement in order to realise the benefits of smart metering. Witnesses to our inquiry told us that "fit and forget" was not an

appropriate approach, because the smartness lies not in the technology itself but in what can be done with it. We told the Government that there must be no compromise on consumer engagement in the rush to meet the roll-out deadline of 2020. If suppliers skimp on their obligations to get as many meters on the wall as possible, consumers will not have the confidence to make use of the information that they provide. I was encouraged by the Government's response:

"The Government agrees with this recommendation. Consumer engagement is at the heart of the smart meter roll-out in Great Britain. It is central to ensuring consumers realise the benefits of smart metering...The Government is...carrying out further work to assess the provision of post-installation support for vulnerable and pre-payment consumers and will seek to ensure good practice is shared across industry."

Will the Minister tell us a little more about how that work is going?

Does the Minister think that there is adequate aftercare for consumers? What form is it taking? After all, a new gadget can be quite intimidating for some people. If that gadget ends up in a drawer, it has all been a waste of effort. Vulnerable and pre-payment customers have the most to gain from smart meters, but they strike me as the ones who are most at risk of being neglected after installation. What does the Minister think is the minimum standard of aftercare that we should look for? Is he confident that it is being delivered at the moment?

To allow other hon. Members plenty of time to speak, I will draw my remarks to a close, although the Committee's report explores many other interesting themes that I am sure will be touched on in the debate. I will conclude with the words of one of the Committee's final recommendations, which might provide a helpful segue into many other aspects of the project:

"The Government has invested in trialling smart meters and in studies of their impact. Smart Energy GB is also making use of evidence in understanding consumer behaviour. Despite the growing evidence base underpinning the project, there are a number of areas where the Government clearly believes there are misconceptions and misunderstandings about the utility, impact, and security of smart metering. The Government should reflect on these in the context of the mass rollout and consider how best to communicate with consumers on some of these topics."

Today's debate could serve as a helpful way of communicating with Members and the wider public on these topics, given that people may already have concerns about the smart metering programme. I look forward to contributions from other hon. Members and to the Minister's response, which I am sure will address many of the concerns that have been raised.

**Mr Andrew Turner (in the Chair):** Members have about 10 minutes each. I call Patricia Gibson to speak.

1.50 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Turner, for calling me to speak, and I also thank the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) for introducing this debate.

I have always been very supportive of the programme to install smart meters. I always believed that smart meters gave consumers control over, and information about, the energy they are using, in near to real time. Smart meters enable the transmission of readings for the amount of gas or electricity being used in each

property, as well as the transmission of information from suppliers to consumers, such as current tariff rates. What could possibly go wrong? An in-home display, or IHD, connects with the smart meter and shows consumers exactly how much their bills will be. The Government's smart metering implementation programme requires energy suppliers to offer 53 million meters to homes and small businesses in Great Britain by 2020. For all these reasons, I was always very supportive of this initiative.

I had understood that high levels of satisfaction with smart meters had been recorded and that consumers were using the technology to help them to gain some control over their energy consumption. I believed that smart meters supported households as they tried to change their behaviour and conserve energy, which would be good for the environment as well as the purse.

Smart Energy GB found that 82% of smart meter users had taken at least one step to use less energy, that 80% of smart meters were checking their IHD regularly and that 81% of users said they would recommend smart meters to other people.

Smart Energy GB's campaign seemed to be creating a positive shift in the levels of understanding of smart meters and the propensity to have them installed. Research suggested that the number of people who understood in detail what a smart meter was, what it did and what it could do had risen to 33%, and of those people 71% said that they would be interested in having a smart meter installed if they did not have one already.

However, like the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock, who spoke before me, I have learned—with some concern—that the Science and Technology Committee has found that the Government do not appear to be clear on the benefits of smart meters. The Government listed 11 different objectives for the project, including saving customers money on energy bills, and yet the amount of money saved by individual consumers is, it seems, expected to be small.

The Committee's report said that the Committee would continue to monitor the implementation of the smart meter programme. I am very interested in longer-term monitoring of it, because the contradictory pictures that are emerging are confusing for consumers. I have been deeply alarmed by some of the findings of the report, which has pointed out that the cost of providing smart meters, some £10.9 billion, is being borne by consumers through their energy bills—an average of £215 per home, including installation costs.

Concern has also been expressed that the smart meters currently being installed are not of the highest specification in terms of function and data security. Indeed, the Committee took evidence that

"the smart meter network is being installed before its requirements as an Internet-connected energy system have been fully determined".

In addition, in March last year the *Financial Times* reported that GCHQ had "intervened" in smart metering security and that the agency had discovered glaring loopholes in meter designs. That poses real questions, and consumers need to be reassured that their data and security are robustly protected in the course of this roll-out.

In Scotland, the priority of the Scottish Government is to press the UK Government to ensure that the programme is delivered to the greatest number of Scottish



[Patricia Gibson]

consumers at the lowest possible cost, while enhancing the benefits to the most vulnerable in our communities and those at risk of fuel poverty.

Concerns have also been addressed that the smart meter roll-out may be hindered by a lack of focus and clarity about its purpose. At the heart of this programme, we need consumer satisfaction and a genuine, hard commitment to tackling fuel poverty. If the documentary referred to by the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock is correct that the biggest beneficiaries of smart meters are the power companies themselves, that would be most alarming.

Of course we want consumers to be more energy wise, to be more informed and to have greater control over their energy use, and we want to use all the means at our disposal to tackle fuel poverty. However, this report by the Science and Technology Committee on the costs and benefits of smart meters for consumers can only be described as alarming. It is to be hoped that the recommendations of the report are acted upon as soon as possible.

If smart meters genuinely empower consumers, help them to save money and help to tackle fuel poverty, we await longer-term independent analysis, which will help to illustrate these things unequivocally. I hope that analysis is forthcoming. Consumers are waiting; we are all waiting.

1.55 pm

**Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con):** I am glad to have the opportunity to talk about smart meters. I remember when we did the inquiry; it was something that I thoroughly enjoyed and learned a great deal from. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), who is the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, for introducing the debate today.

There is no doubt that we should welcome the roll-out of smart meters, and we do welcome it. There is a genuine opportunity to bring an end to physical meter reading. I live down a very long lane and twice a year some very delightful gentleman finds his way down to where I live, to read the meter. I will talk a little about how successful that has been later on.

I am not looking to put people out of jobs, but where technology helps us to get accurate information and manage our energy use, as well as to provide data that can help to manage the nation's energy supply and planning, it needs to be welcomed, and I think the smart meter roll-out is welcome.

As we have heard, smart meters have clear benefits. Their introduction has the potential to help consumers to reduce their energy consumption, shift their energy demand away from peak periods, which the Chairman of our Committee referred to earlier, and improve customer choice. Choice is a particularly interesting angle; if smart meters allow people to switch suppliers quickly and to access better tariffs, they must be welcome.

All of these measures will help constituents in west Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly. We already know that 80% of smart meter owners are taking steps to reduce their energy consumption. According to Smart Energy GB, individuals are turning off lights, switching

off the heating at certain times and changing the way in which certain household appliances are used, all in a proactive effort to engage with their energy usage.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) mention fuel poverty. My concern is that once people on limited budgets realise how much energy different appliances use, they will start to behave in a way that is harmful to them—particularly older people during winter months. So we need to be very careful about how we communicate with people and empower them to get the best out of their homes.

The smart meter roll-out on its own is not really good enough. I know that this is a slightly separate issue, but the Government must consider how we can improve the efficiency of people's homes, particularly those of vulnerable people. Otherwise, the smart meter roll-out might actually be detrimental for those households.

Dr Sarah Darby of the Environmental Change Institute has said that smart meters are effective, smart systems that bring together every-day human intelligence and technical ingenuity. We are beginning to hear about some problems with the roll-out, and I am glad that we conducted the inquiry last year. We are well into the programme for 2020. As an elected representative in my first Parliament, I recognise that 2020 is coming around very quickly; it keeps me on my toes every weekend. Far more important, however, is the roll-out of the smart meter programme.

Technological advances should always benefit the consumer; it is really important that that is clear, otherwise we will never get proper engagement. However, the delay in the data communications company's go-live date has put these benefits at risk. Originally, the company was meant to go live in autumn 2015; in reality, it was late in November 2016—more than a year later—and it was even later for the north of England.

That delayed start has meant that the 2020 deadline for the roll-out of smart meters across the country is rushing up on us. It has created an impractical timetable for suppliers. I am particularly concerned about the smaller energy suppliers. We are trying to encourage them into the market, yet we have created quite a challenge for them to supply their customers with smart meters. The delay to stage 1 of the roll-out has placed the availability of SMETS 1 meters under strain, as purchasing was done on the knowledge that their installation would have been completed a year earlier. I have been speaking to the smaller suppliers, and they are talking about the massive difficulty they have in sourcing the meters and the qualified competent engineers to fit them. There is now a need to extend the roll-out period for SMETS 1 meters to meet the delay in the go-live date and to address the functionality concerns about the SMETS 2 meters, which are being used for the mass roll-out of the scheme.

The lack of planning for the launch and the deadline for the roll-out of smart meters has increased costs and uncertainty for suppliers, who still have to meet the legally binding deadline of 2020. We know full well that if costs increase for suppliers, those costs will only ever go to the consumer. I am always referring to people struggling on limited budgets to meet their energy bills. The strict timetable has also meant that there is less time to test and learn the system, which could lead to greater problems down the line and has meant that many promised benefits for consumers cannot be delivered.

Additionally, part of the changes to the DCC functionality has removed the ability of consumers to switch between credit and prepay modes. In the inquiry, I remember talking about those with prepay meters and the kind of revolution that smart meters would bring for them. Prepay customers pay more for their energy, and they pay up front. Some of the people I meet have no choice; they are in properties that belong to other people. When I talk to social landlords, they see the roll-out of smart meters as an opportunity to help their tenants to reduce their bills and manage their finances more easily. What we are finding is that they are not able to switch between credit and prepay modes. The meters cannot deliver in the way we expected. That is a disadvantage for millions of prepay meter customers across the country as they cannot gain access to the market.

Dr Sarah Darby's definition of smart meters also pointed to the importance of shaping human behaviours. We have already heard about that today. Improving energy use practices and consumer's energy know-how are essential to ensuring that the full benefits of smart meters are realised. Data from the "Smart energy outlook" show that awareness of smart metering and its benefits rose by only 7% in the past year. That needs to be improved, and that is despite Gaz and Leccy. Gaz and Leccy are enormous role models for my children. We watch their adverts regularly. If you do not know Gaz and Leccy, Mr Turner, you must go home and do the research. It will add value to your life. I share an office with three other MPs, and they have spent considerable time in research, watching Gaz and Leccy. They are fantastic adverts. They are absolutely worth watching, and they help to get across the point that we are not in control of the energy we use. However, if we are seeing only a 7% increase in awareness, despite that brilliant media campaign, we are not getting the information out in the way we should. Unless consumers understand the benefit of smart metering, we are not going to win the battle.

I was a builder before I came here. I used to do barn conversions. For many years, in every barn conversion I completed, a smart meter was installed, but often concerns about how the data would be used meant that it was never used. Instead, it was just left on the side. Because it was not integral to the structure of the building, it would just be unplugged. Customers would tell me, "I don't want my energy supplier knowing when I am making a cup of tea or when I'm getting out of bed or when I'm doing this or something else." There is a real need to make customers aware of what data are collected, why they are collected, for whose benefit and how they are used. That is a battle we have not yet fully dealt with or addressed.

Smart metering will improve the temporal resolution of energy data, but it will still not differentiate between heating and other energy demand, nor will it show where in the building energy is used so the need to address energy efficiency in the home remains.

There are some connectivity issues with smart meters, and I want to talk about my experience. We did the inquiry last year. I explained that the gentleman walks or drives down my lane a couple of times a year. On an unusual occasion I met him, and he said, "Do you know, your meter is still showing 'blank'"—I had an old-fashioned meter—"so I have not been able to take a reading for four years?" I said, "Okay. What can I do

about it?" He said, "I don't want to tell you this, because it will put me out of a job, but you ought to put a smart meter in." I applied for a smart meter and had one fitted. The energy company had estimated how much energy I had used in the past four years. I disputed it and, with the help of my children, managed to reduce the estimate. The energy company gave me a new bill that was considerably less, although that is a matter for another debate altogether.

The smart meter was fitted. Once a month, I have to go outside and take a photo of my smart meter and send that photo over broadband to the supplier, because I do not have connectivity. My smart meter is not connected to anything, because I do not have mobile phone signal. That will be a challenge if we are going to provide 20 million smart meters—or however many we are supplying; it is quite a lot—by 2020.

I am the local MP and, interestingly, the local BBC presenter recently emailed me to say that he had a smart meter fitted, and he has to do exactly the same thing. It is a bit worrying if we are to win public support for smart meters if the local MP and the local BBC presenter have meters that do not work. Clearly, this is a private meeting, so I am not telling the world that my smart meter does not work, but I do enjoy telling the story.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I have no idea where the hon. Gentleman lives in Cornwall—he is clearly not getting a signal—but it is a much more general problem. At the present time, the smart meters are not functional in tall buildings. Does he consider that to be as big a problem as the one facing those living in the remoter parts of Cornwall?

**Derek Thomas:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I thank him for that intervention. I raised the issue because I am wedded to the idea of getting smart meters. If we get them right, they are a fantastic thing, and we should be ambitious, but the roll-out will be flawed and difficult to recover if we cannot deal with the connectivity issues. The issue is not just for the Minister; it is for the whole of Government to recognise the challenge of giving each of us the best available modern-day technology. I will move on, because I am probably taking too long.

The roll-out of smart meters will undoubtedly help my constituents in west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, but there is work to do to convince them of the benefits and how smart meters can help them manage their energy better and in a different way, so that we do not place such a demand on, dare I say it, fossil and nuclear power. In Cornwall, we generate more energy than we use, such that wind turbines are turned off. If we get it right, and we learn to store energy, we will get people moving to electricity and away from oil for heating. We will be able to be much smarter about the generation and use of energy.

Smart meters have an important part to play, but the Government need to look at the challenge of delivering the programme by 2020. There is a real need for an independent review of the safety, cost and deliverability of the roll-out of smart meters. We must consider the pressure that suppliers are under to find and retain qualified engineers, to source the meters that will do the job and to ensure that they are fitted in a way that helps rather than hinders the consumer. The 2020 deadline is

[Derek Thomas]

too ambitious. The cost and expertise required for installing smart meters has been underestimated, and if we stick to the current deadline, the impact on consumer experience will undoubtedly be negative. That is a shame, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get it right.

To conclude, it is clear that the intentions behind the roll-out of smart meters are good. I am absolutely a fan of the ambition, but we have to accept that the timetable is over-ambitious and potentially harmful to consumers. We therefore must use caution, re-evaluate the timetable and draw on the words of Benjamin Franklin—we must prepare properly, or prepare for smart meters to fail. I did not write that last bit, and I am not sure that it is the best bit of my speech. Thank you very much, Mr Turner.

2.9 pm

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner.

I think there is something in the pathology of Government in this country—civil servants and Ministers—that means that we do not seem to learn from every new IT or technology project that goes wrong; we just wait for the next one to come along and that goes wrong. I think it was as long ago as 2000 that the then Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, Sir Ian McCartney, produced a special report, which, from memory, covered 12 IT projects that had gone wrong at horrific cost. Everybody said what a good report it was—which it was—but have Government learned from that? No. One could go through NHS recordkeeping, the Home Office, national insurance record systems, Libra—there are a whole series of IT projects that have put huge costs on the public accounts.

There are some real difficulties with smart meters, and I agree with the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson). We have good reason to be alarmed, however sensible it is to be in support of people having more real-time information about the energy they are consuming. Who could disagree with that as a reasonable objective? But let us look first at the Government's cost-benefit figures, which the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), the Chair of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, referred to.

Written evidence to the Committee said that the process the Government had used to get a cost of £12.1 billion and a net benefit of £4 billion was intellectual slosh, when compared to eight other international studies, and asked some fairly fundamental questions. Why, when Texas has 350 pages of regulations to cover its smart meter system, does our system have 7,000 pages? I have not only had the pleasure of taking part in the Science and Technology Committee's report; I also sat on the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change with the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). We asked just how many pages there were on the SMETS 2 meters, and it was a huge number of pages. One has to ask why there is no comparison. Why is it that in Italy and Spain the individual cost of meters is about half the price that they are in this country? The hon. Member for North

Ayrshire and Arran pointed to one of the reasons. There are 11 objectives and in anything with 11 objectives, things will get lost.

One of the major objectives, however it is stated, is to stabilise the energy network. It can be destabilised because we are using intermittent sources of energy, such as photovoltaics and wind farms. When there is a big change in the wind or sunshine, that can destabilise the network. Smart meters can help to stabilise that. That is one objective. It is a national objective, the costs of which have been put on the individual energy consumer. I do not think that is fair. The German assessment—one of the eight other studies referred to—found that there was really only a benefit of moving to smart meters when individual consumption was more than 6,500 kwh per annum. That means there would only be a benefit for 10% of consumers.

There is a great deal to be worried about, including the background, the assessments and the principles. The incompatibility between the SMETS 1 and SMETS 2 systems, which has also already been referred to, is a real problem that is yet to be solved. An even bigger problem is that when Ministers were asked by the Energy and Climate Change Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test may well have asked the question—what will keep the costs of the project down, because the Government have no control over that, the answer was “competition”. When British Gas are the near-monopoly supplier of the meters, that is not good enough.

The costs are going up, there is no compatibility between SMETS 1 and SMETS 2 meters, and if someone changes energy supplier, the meter will not work, so all the benefits of knowing the level of consumption disappear. That points to a fundamental flaw in the design. The meters should have been supplied, owned and paid for by the network supply companies, not directly by the electricity suppliers. If competition is what is going to keep price down, but a customer cannot move easily and get the benefit of a smart meter, it simply will not work.

I would almost guarantee without asking that every person in this room has a smartphone—we meet some people without smartphones, but very few indeed. In a common-sense world, a sensible system of trying to get immediate information—I accept it would not work at the moment in the more remote parts of Cornwall and perhaps Scotland—would be for someone to get the information directly to their smartphone and to have the control on their smartphone as well. That would solve the problem of the system not working if they changed supplier and of having to go somewhere to look at the meter.

I was in the British Embassy in Finland nearly 17 years ago, when a representative of Nokia showed me how he could close the curtains in his house and change which electrical appliances were working. Yet we started 10 years later, putting in systems that are less good than that Nokia system was then. We have to answer the question of why the system we are putting in is essentially obsolete, and chunky. It does not seem sensible.

One point that has not yet been made is that of security. We had a private briefing from GCHQ, which was quite reassuring, but we also got contradictory evidence from the Royal Academy of Engineering, which told us:

“The smart meter network is being installed before its requirements as an Internet-connected energy system have been fully determined”,



and that

“the threat of cyber attacks—either to gain information, ‘steal’ electricity or disrupt supply—is real and pressing...Disruption to energy and gas supplies at a massive scale is possible, either from cyber attack or errors in software.”

It went on to say that those are not the only threats to the system, and that it could be threatened by rogue programmers.

I think the idea of having complete knowledge of the energy that one consumes is a desirable objective, but we are doing this in a way that will be not appreciated by the consumer and will probably cost them money. I have one final question for the Minister. There has been a large assessment of this scheme, and I understand that there were four years of freedom of information requests before the document was published. Will the Minister put it into the House of Commons Library? If he will not, will he explain why?

2.20 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I thank the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) for securing this debate. I have learned this afternoon that there are two things I need to see: first, the ITV documentary, if I can get it on catch up; and, secondly, *Gaz and Leccy*, which I have not seen, but then again I do not watch television—that is my excuse and I will stick to it. It is interesting that the documentary said that energy companies have so far been the biggest beneficiaries of smart meters. That fact was reflected in the comments of several hon. Members.

Smart meters were billed as transformational—they were going to revolutionise the way we use and monitor energy—but, a number of years into the smart meter roll-out, it seems that the benefits to consumers are limited and amount to a few pounds a year. The cost of the roll-out—£10.9 billion, or £215 per household—certainly seems far greater than any of the benefits. The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) talked about the different price in parts of Europe where similar schemes have been rolled out at a much lower cost. We need to look at that.

There are great benefits to using smart meters. Up-to-date billing allows consumers to spread the cost of their energy use, which can be very important in tackling fuel poverty, and the real-time usage information allows consumers to monitor what is going on. One of the things we do with our smart meter at home—these are the great games that we play as we do not have a television—is to see how we can reduce the house’s energy consumption by going round switching things off and seeing what difference it makes. It is incredible to see the difference that switching on a kettle can make. Things such as that can make consumers think more carefully about how they use energy, so it does have benefits. Meter data can be used to smooth demand on the grid, as the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock spoke about in detail.

There are lots of challenges to the roll-out. The fact that the mobile phone network is being used to relay the information to the energy companies is problematic in some areas, and completely restrictive to the point of not working, as we have heard, in others. We know that that is a problem in rural areas—the hon. Member for

St Ives (Derek Thomas) said that he has to take a photograph and send it to the energy company. The roll-out will obviously be more challenging in rural areas—I am thinking about the highlands and islands of Scotland in particular. It is easy to install a lot of meters in an area of high population density, but it is more difficult when people are scattered widely across an area.

The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton mentioned flats and offices. That is an ongoing issue, which has to be looked at far more seriously than it is at the moment. The lack of qualified installers means it will be a challenge to reach the 2020 target, which the hon. Member for St Ives spoke about. I visited Scottish Gas’s training centre in Hamilton near Glasgow a few months ago. I saw smart meter installers being trained, and I looked at the equipment they use. Scottish Gas has lots of apprentices, and they are being trained not only in installation but in customer service and engagement. I am not sure every consumer gets service as good as those installers are being trained to provide.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the issue of data. Obviously, data can be used by energy companies to monitor consumption, but in our inquiry the Science and Technology Committee looked at the issue of who, other than the energy companies, is able to access the data. We asked whether, for example, somebody would be able to see that a person’s energy consumption had dropped, and therefore infer that they were not at home or on holiday. My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) raised the issue of GCHQ’s intervention in smart meter technology.

We know that certain demographics are more reluctant to engage with technology—I am thinking of elderly people in particular. Some of these meters are extremely user-friendly, but that is not always the case. The hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock talked in great detail about the difficulties with SMETS 1 meters—first-generation meters. The problem is not just the incompatibility of those meters. There is also the issue that some of the new meters being installed are of a far lower standard than others. There is great variety in the meters that are being installed. The ones that I saw at Scottish Gas were all-singing, all-dancing, and could probably make a cup of tea as well, but the meter I have got is far less interactive. There is a real danger—we have seen this happen—that after a short time people toss the meter, or at least the display unit, in a drawer or a cupboard somewhere.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): I agree with all the hon. Lady’s points. I do not think this issue was covered in our Committee’s report, but is she concerned that the cost of a second meter falls on the customer? The report shows that there is not enough advantage for the customer, compared with the energy companies.

**Carol Monaghan:** Absolutely. As I said at the start of my speech, the energy companies are the biggest beneficiaries of the smart metering programme. If a customer has to pay another £250 for a second meter because they have changed suppliers, it makes changing too costly. The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton talked about the use of smartphones as a display, instead of using the units. Perhaps that is something for the future.

[Carol Monaghan]

Fuel poverty was mentioned by a number of speakers, including my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran and the hon. Member for St Ives. The hon. Gentleman talked about vulnerable consumers seeing the amount of energy they were using and possibly being unwilling to heat their homes. That is a danger, but the biggest danger in that case is possibly the cost of energy and fuel poverty, rather than the meter.

To finish, I have a few questions for the Minister. First, what support will there be for people who have first-generation meters that could be obsolete even before the 2020 roll-out? Secondly, what will the Government do to increase consumer engagement, to make people more energy savvy and allow them to see how best to use their meter? Thirdly, will the Minister reassure all of us that the 2020 target for smart meter roll-out must not be met at the expense of the consumer?

2.31 pm

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I congratulate the Science and Technology Committee on its excellent report, which has been the subject of our discussions this afternoon. I also congratulate the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) on his success in obtaining the debate and on his presentation of the Committee's concerns, which started an exceptionally well-informed debate about smart meters and their roll-out. I add a caveat, however: the problem is that the more we are informed about the subject, the more questions arise about what has happened, what will happen and what is going on with smart meter roll-out.

A number of those questions arise from what the Select Committee characterised as the multiplicity of aims set out by the Government for smart meter roll-out, and from the dissonance between what are presented as the benefits of the roll-out and what the various benefits actually are. Across this Chamber, I think we would say that those benefits from smart meters are real and considerable over a period time, but they are not necessarily cast as much for the public's benefit as they are presented.

We do not need to look at a television documentary to tell us where and how the benefits fall, because the Select Committee report provides a helpful breakdown, derived from the 2014 impact assessment of the smart meter balance of benefits. The report sets out, perhaps more widely than in some of our discussion, what range of benefits occurs to what section of the industry and to consumers as a result of the smart meter roll-out.

For example, the Select Committee report sets out the estimated total benefits of smart meters, once they have been installed completely: more than £5 billion accrues to consumers from energy saving and micro-generation; but supplier benefits—the big six energy companies and others—come in at £8 billion, arising from avoided site visits, fewer inquiries and other such things related to the management of energy supply. The benefits also spray out to the rest of the energy industry: network benefits from reduced losses, reduced outage notification calls, fault fixing and so on come in at an estimated £1 billion; and generation benefits from avoided investment in generation from peak shifting through time-of-use arrangements and so on are getting on for another £1 billion.

That picture of the estimated benefits—based on Government figures—clearly shows that the consumer benefit is a fraction of the overall figure. The entire cost of the smart meter roll-out, however, will clearly be borne by that first group I mentioned, the consumers. I worry a little that that continues to be obfuscated in any presentation of what is happening with smart meters.

For example, the 2016 impact assessment—which by the way considerably downgrades the total benefits available and substantially increases the amount for the costs engaged in the system, in particular for DCC—insists on stating:

“Energy suppliers will be required to fund the capital costs of smart meters and IHDs. They will also pay for the installation, operation and maintenance of this equipment plus the communications hub (which links the smart meters to the supplier via the DCC).”

I imagine that that paragraph looks okay from the Government point of view, because it emphasises that the Government are not paying. At the other end, however, consumers are.

Consumers will probably pay somewhere between £130 and £200 on their bills to recover the costs of the installation of a smart meter on their property. Just this week two of the big six companies announced sky-high increases in their bills. They stated that the increase is as a result of the price surge in rising wholesale energy prices and—admitting this, I think, for the first time—the Government's smart meter policy. They specifically state that of the 10% increase, a substantial element is because of the smart meter policy.

Among other things I would like to hear from the Minister this afternoon—it would save me some time, because I sent him a written question on this precise issue, so perhaps we will short-circuit the reply process—is, what are energy companies doing about their recovery of money from smart meters? If what is being said about the recent price rises is an accurate depiction of where the increases come from, at the very least energy companies are seeking to recover the cost of smart meters up-front in tariffs, rather than spreading it over a longer period. If that is the case, the £100 increase on the fuel bill as a result of price increases by the two companies can be depicted as a recovery of between £30 and £40 of smart meter costs in that price alone, which looks like a substantially greater amount of recovery than should have been the case given the spread out nature of the installation of smart meters and what is meant to be the recovery of costs over a period of time.

Has the Minister had any discussions with the energy companies about their policy for the recovery of the cost of smart meter introduction? How will they do that and what will be the impact on bills, bearing in mind that we know that consumers will be paying for it?

I have a great deal of sympathy with the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) made that it does not seem right for consumers to bear the whole cost of the introduction and roll-out of smart meters in the way that has been described, particularly given that the benefits are spread across the industry.

The other point that worries me on the basis of better information is the progress of smart meter roll-out. The Select Committee drew attention to that issue, but it is also apparent from the most recent impact assessment, which came out in late 2016, and the announcement at

the end of 2016, which the Chair of the Select Committee pointed out, that DCC had finally gone live-ish at the end of November. I make two points about the significance of DCC going live. First, it announced that it had gone live on precisely the last day before it would have started paying penalties for not going live. It announced that it was going live in only two out of the three areas that it operated in, and that it would go live in the third area a month later.

Secondly, the going-live document contained pages and pages of “workarounds”—in English, that means “things we haven’t resolved yet”—and those appear still to be substantially outstanding. I understand from talking to people who rely on DCC going live to get going with SMETS 2 meters in a coherent way that a good proportion of those workarounds and the way things are presently configured render it difficult reliably to go live on those meters. So, to paraphrase a phrase that we have heard recently, is DCC going live actually DCC going live? Are there still issues with DCC, and particularly SMETS 2 roll-out, that we need to look at?

Finally, one of the consequences of roll-out not having started very quickly and SMETS 1 meters having been rolled out that may well be obsolete and need to be replaced in the second phase of roll-out is that in the 2016 impact assessment, there is a curve for roll-out—not just the roll-out itself but the speed of the roll-out—with a gradient that bears no resemblance to the gradient of the curve in the 2014 impact assessment. Contrary to previous suggestions that about a million and a bit meters per year would be installed between 2017-18 and 2018-19 before the finishing date of 2020, it is now suggested that 2.5 million meters should be installed per year. The industry says that it will be impossible to do that over that period.

All that adds up to the suggestion that the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) made that it may be time for a review of what is going on, so that we are clear that we can achieve the roll-out on time and it will have the expected benefits for customers, on the basis of a fair distribution of costs and benefits.

**Mr Andrew Turner (in the Chair):** I call the Minister, who has until 2.58 pm.

2.44 pm

**The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I hope that you have got something out of the debate. At the very least, we have had an introduction to Gaz and Leccy, courtesy of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas).

I congratulate the Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), his Committee and its previous Chairman for an extremely useful report and debate. He described our commitment to ensure that every household and small business is offered a smart meter by the end of 2020 as a “major project”. I think he rather underestimates it, and we need to bear that in mind.

It is absolutely right and a central part of a functional democracy that Select Committees and Opposition parties probe, prod, ask tough questions and even, in our view, tip over the line into spreading alarm. That is how we

operate, and it is entirely right, particularly when we are faced with a project on this scale, not least as the past is littered with good intention and bad execution, as the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) pointed out. I therefore entirely welcome the challenge that we have heard during the debate, but I urge hon. Members not to lose sight of the context.

We are talking about an upgrade of a significant part of our infrastructure—a 100-year-old technology that means that far too many people receive bills on which their consumption is estimated. We do not tolerate that in the supermarket, so why on earth, in 2017, should we tolerate it at home? Our energy system is absolutely functional to a smart and prosperous economy, so why should people continue to be dependent on a technology that is so out of date? That is the context: it is about upgrading out-of-date infrastructure as part of a bigger transformation and transition process in our energy system.

I think there is cross-party agreement about the opportunity and need to move to a smart system that is more flexible and ultimately cheaper, and which our constituents feel they have more control over. I do not think there is any real resistance to the direction of travel, but the debate sits in that important context. Hon. Members have posed tough questions and challenges, which I will do my best to respond to, but those who know anything about system change and consumer behaviour change should recognise that some of the momentum is genuinely encouraging, and we must not lose sight of that. Almost 5 million customers now have smart meters, and the economic analysis continues to suggest that they will have a net benefit of £5.7 billion. We do not obfuscate about that in any way, and that analysis is regularly updated.

[ROBERT FLELLO *in the Chair*]

The Chairman of the Select Committee talked about the benefit to consumers. I know the point he was trying to make, but we are all aware that consumers are concerned about costs. Evidence from British Gas surveys suggests that consumers with smart meters save 3% or so on their energy bills, which, in my experience, is material, and I think he also knows that those savings will grow as we move towards 2030.

One important piece of information that has been missing from this debate is that consumers like smart meters. Surveys suggest that something like eight out of 10 people with smart meters would recommend them to their friends. There are of course big challenges around implementing them—how could there not be?—but we are driving hard a process that our constituents like and which is an important part of upgrading the country’s infrastructure.

I will do my best to address the issues that have been raised, particularly by the Chairman of the Select Committee, whose points were valid. He quite rightly presses us on the need to tackle the technical limitations, which are real. A conscious decision was taken to proceed with SMETS 1, because first-stage smart meters do deliver some benefits and were an essential part of the process of getting a supplier system moving and helping to prepare for installation. Of course, we do not want our constituents to trade off the opportunity to get a better tariff against the opportunity to retain smart functionality. That is clear.



[Mr Nick Hurd]

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock that the DCC has begun the project to enrol the SMETS 1 smart meters from 2018 in order to make them usable by all energy suppliers rather than just the one that initially installed them. This is an issue I feel strongly about and the Government will be watching extremely carefully. There has been a consultation. Nothing I have heard gives me cause for alarm at this stage but it is extremely important that we end up at a destination where the early smart meters are usable by all energy suppliers and constituents do not face trade-offs between tariff and functionality.

My hon. Friend pressed me on national benefits and the need to make a broader case than the simple proposition, “This will save you money.” That is an interesting debate, and it is the same kind of debate and challenge that I am wrestling with, as Minister for Climate Change, in engaging people with climate change. Do we try to frame it in language that talks simply about things that are closer to home and more relevant to our constituents, or do we try to put it into a bigger picture of public good? Most of the advice suggests that when trying to propose something to a consumer or our constituents, it is better to focus on the issues and concerns most directly relevant to them.

I would draw a distinction between, as it were, a marketing proposition to a consumer and our constituents and the need for this place, with its processes of accountability, transparency and scrutiny, to be clear about what we are trying to do and what the wider benefits are. That is entirely valid. My hon. Friend wanted more information about the system benefits, which are a clear part of the net benefits analysis, and I think they are real. They fit into the broader strategic thrust that the Department is now leading on, in moving towards a smarter system. He may be aware that we put out a call for evidence recently and we are receiving information on that. That information about how smart meters fit into a broader strategic thrust to make the system more smart and flexible will be transparent and open to accountability and scrutiny.

My hon. Friend asked about consumer engagement. He is entirely right about that, because ultimately smart meters must be a fantastic consumer experience; otherwise, these things will sit in drawers and get ignored—everything that the contributors to the debate have rightly pointed to. That is why we mandated the setting up of Smart Energy GB and mandated energy suppliers to engage with their consumers before, during and after installation. Smart Energy GB is working with trusted third parties, including Citizens Advice, National Energy Action, the National Housing Federation and Age UK, among many others, to ensure that customers can access advice about the roll-out. I should add that we are conducting our own research into consumers’ experience about the service they get after installation, which is a point he made specifically.

**Dr Mathias:** I am concerned about the exaggeration of the benefit for customers. In the Select Committee we found that we have one of the smallest variations between peak and standard demand of almost any country in the world. I put it to the Minister that we

should be honest with consumers and say, “No, it is the companies and the Government, in policy making, who will benefit from this most.”

**Mr Hurd:** I am not sure that is entirely right. My hon. Friend is right that the benefits are not restricted entirely to consumers, but that has been made public; we have been open about that. Missing from the debate is an acknowledgment that suppliers face costs associated with installing the meters, which need to be recovered. Yes, there are system benefits, but this is not something that does not benefit our constituents and consumers. We want less cost in the system and a smarter system, and if the meters contribute to that, that is good. I come back to—not estimates, but actuals, if we believe it—the large British Gas survey of their customers, who are achieving 3% savings. That is not immaterial, particularly because, as she well knows—she is close to her constituents’ concerns—we are in a climate where people are concerned about rising energy costs, as we saw the other day.

**Dr Mathias:** This is not what we investigated, but, as the Minister knows, the direct debit monthly bills for customers with smart meters still use estimates.

**Mr Hurd:** We need to move on from estimates—that is part of the point. We do not make purchases or pay estimated bills in other areas, so why should we in this area? The whole point is to move to a system where we can pay for what we use. The point I am labouring is that the actual data, not the estimates or predictions, suggest that people are saving money now, and not in an immaterial way. If the projections are right, that will grow.

I want to say something briefly about privacy and reach, which I know from having tackled this in a previous debate is a particular concern for many communities in Scotland. Suppliers must take all reasonable steps to reach all households in Great Britain, islands included. Privacy has been an important issue from the start; in fact, I remember constituents raising it with me. Let me assure the House that a robust privacy framework is in place. The central principle of the framework is that consumers have control over who can access their consumption data and only authorised parties can access consumption data through the Data Communications Company.

I hope that I have addressed some of the principal concerns. Let me address a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives and others, questioning the ambition and pace. We hear that point, not least from suppliers, and we tend to hear it from those suppliers who are performing less well than others. I think the House is savvy enough to know that some of the motives behind such questioning and challenge may be mixed. Our position is that we recognise that the situation is challenging, but we are driving system change and it needs to be driven hard. We review the situation and will continue to do so and to listen.

I do not see any argument at this stage that the Government should send a signal of weakening ambition. Far from it. Actually, given the prizes attached to this, if we want to get it right—a lot is work in progress in tackling some of the thorny, difficult issues that underlie it—it is not right to send any signal of slipping ambition. For that reason, I come back to my main point, Mr Ffello

—it is good to see you in the Chair. This is not a trivial issue; it is a fundamental piece in the broader picture of how we upgrade our critical energy infrastructure to deliver a better system for our constituents.

2.58 pm

**Stephen Metcalfe:** Welcome to the Chair, Mr Ffello. I thank the Minister for his words and for some of his assurances. Forgive me if I failed to recognise the scale of the challenge. I do not; I get that it is a huge undertaking. However, he will agree that the role of the Science and Technology Committee is to provide challenge where possible. We all recognise that there are huge potential benefits to be found through smart metering. We want those benefits to be available as quickly as possible and for them to be rolled out in a way that we can all understand.

We heard praise and concern in all the contributions. I have a long list of people, which I will not have time to go through, but they covered issues around fuel poverty and who actually gains: the consumer or the supplier? The one issue I had not imagined would come up this afternoon was using a smart meter as a replacement for a television, running around the house, seeing what to switch off. However, from my experience, I know when someone has left their straighteners or a television on in the house, because the meter goes into the red, and we do benefit from that.

We all want this programme to work, and with enough effort I am sure we will get it to work. We will continue to keep an eye on it, and I am sure that the Minister will also—

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Order.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## State Pension: Working-class Women

3 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of state pension changes on working-class women.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello—particularly for such an important debate. When I heard that I had been successful in securing the debate, I posted on Facebook and Twitter asking working-class women to share their experiences with me. I was overwhelmed by the response; I received tweets, emails and posts from women the length and breadth of the country. Every hon. Member has constituents who are directly affected by this issue, and I am sure more hon. Members would be present were it not the last day before the recess.

This is a complex subject, but basic issues of fairness, justice and dignity in old age are at its heart. The Pensions Act 1995, brought in by the then Conservative Government, raised the women's state pension age from 60 to 65, making it the same as men's. I am proud to call myself a feminist, and as such, I agree with that equalisation, so long as those women have equal opportunities and life chances; unfortunately, as we will see, that is not the case. I also agree with raising the retirement age. We are living almost a decade longer than our grandparents on average, so it is right that we should also work longer and still be able to enjoy many years in healthy retirement. However, that does not mean that I must agree with the unfair way in which these changes have been implemented.

As the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign has highlighted—I am glad to see so many of its representatives in the Gallery—the changes have hit hundreds of thousands of women born in the 1950s particularly hard. There is real anger among those women at their unfair treatment because of the month in which they were born. There is anger about the lack of appropriate notification, despite recommendations from independent bodies, such as the Turner Commission, that the affected women deserved 15 years' notice. There is anger that the pace of change has been much faster than that promised when the changes were initiated in 1995. There is anger that some women have been hit by multiple increases in their state pension age; the Prime Minister's saying that no woman had seen an increase to their expected pension age of more than 18 months was a patent injustice to the many women who have seen multiple increases.

These issues have been debated previously, and the Labour party has called for transitional arrangements for the WASPI women. We have laid out a fully costed plan to return their eligibility for pension credits to the timetable of the 1995 Act—but that proposal has fallen on deaf ears. One particular aspect that has not been adequately considered is the effect that the changes have had on working-class women, the subject of today's debate, which was inspired by a constituent of mine. Like many Members, I am sure, I am often moved by the spirit and basic decency of so many of my constituents in the face of almost unbelievably bad treatment, but Mrs Tenniswood's story moved me almost to tears.

Mrs Tenniswood is 60, and has worked as a dressmaker since she was 15. I emphasise that point: before 1972, the school-leaving age in this country was 15. Few working-class women went on to further education—only

6% in the late 1970s, for example—so many of the women we are talking about left school and started full-time work many years before they would be allowed to today. They will therefore have worked for longer than any other retirement group now or in the future.

Last year, Mrs Tenniswood asked for her pension statement, and she learned that she had 42 qualifying years, yet she is not entitled to a state pension until she reaches the age of 66. By then, she will have been working in a manual job for around 50 years—half a century—with a likely number of 48 qualifying years, which is significantly higher than the 35 years usually required to reach the maximum state pension. That is especially the experience of working-class women of that generation, who are more likely to have started work immediately after leaving school at 15, and who are also more likely to be in manual trades, which take a greater toll on the body as it ages.

Mrs Tenniswood is a dressmaker. As such, she is often required to get down on her knees to pin and check fittings, and sharp eyesight is essential, given the detailed stitching required. Having done that physically demanding job for 42 years, she was suddenly told she would have to wait another six years for her state pension, during which the condition of her eyesight and joints will worsen as her profession takes its toll on her body. I do not know about you, Mr Ffello, but I find bobbing to catch the Speaker's eye quite tiring; I certainly would not want to be working on my knees in my 60s.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The hon. Lady is giving a graphic account of the difficulties that Mrs Tenniswood and many other women have faced. Mrs Tenniswood has paid national insurance contributions for 42 years. Is it not the case that somebody in her situation was doing that under the impression that that was a contract with the Government—an entitlement to a pension? The hon. Lady has described how Mrs Tenniswood has had to write and ask for her pension statement, but the Government should have communicated with Mrs Tenniswood. That failure of communication has not allowed people the time to properly prepare, which is the real damage caused by the changes.

**Chi Onwurah:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right—there is a sense of a broken contract between the state and hard-working citizens. The failure to give adequate notice means that the changes could not have been planned for. The consequences of many life decisions that WASPI women have taken are now that they face many years of reduced income that they could not have anticipated.

Mrs Tenniswood's experience is far from unique. One woman told me that she has a neck injury and spondylitis—two debilitating diseases that would exclude her from many jobs. She said:

“I do not want to be forced to work until I drop.”

Why should she be? Another woman told me that she had recently been diagnosed with osteophytic lipping in her hips. She said:

“I am not so mobile as I once was. I cannot possibly carry on getting in and out of a car with the chemist's deliveries—”

that is her job—

“30 to 50 times a day.”

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Constituents of mine have been in exactly the same position as Mrs Tenniswood, so her case is not exceptional, but unfortunately very much the norm. These women have paid in year after year and then, when they come to take back something that they thought they would receive, it is not there. Not only that, but they cannot get other entitlements that are linked to the age of retirement, so it makes things very difficult for them. Sometimes, if they fall on hard times, the Department for Work and Pensions deals with them in a way that is demeaning, which also does not help.

**Chi Onwurah:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, part of the debate is about dignity in old age. It is also about the contract with the state. In fact, he has anticipated what I was going to say. In the case of Mrs Tenniswood, one bureaucratic letter took away the certainty that she had had for most of her working life in a very hard trade. The belief that the state would provide her with a pension in her old age—one she had earned—was torn to shreds.

Because Mrs Tenniswood is working class, her life expectancy is lower. In Newcastle, the gap in average life expectancy between inner-city Byker and more affluent South Gosforth is 12.6 years, and the gap is rising under this Government. This pattern is repeated across the country. Owing to the health inequalities from which we still suffer, working-class women are on average expected to die seven years earlier than their peers from more affluent backgrounds. When Mrs Tenniswood finally receives her pension, she can expect to have less time to enjoy it than other women of her age, and she is likely to have a worse experience of old age.

A quarter of Newcastle's neighbourhoods are in the 10% most deprived in the country. In Newcastle, we are more likely to die earlier from cancer, heart disease and strokes. We suffer from the diseases of our industrial legacy, such as asbestosis. Heart attacks are responsible for 1,100 premature deaths in the north-east every year, which is higher than the national average because of the income disparity. Such inequality is replicated in regions across the country. Data from the Office for National Statistics tell us that, compared with women who live in more affluent areas, working-class women will live for 19 years longer in poor health. So they live shorter lives and a higher proportion of their time is spent in poor health before they die. That is also true of working-class men; I recognise that. They also suffer from significant health inequalities, but, as we have heard, they have not had their expectations of retirement overturned without any attempt to ease the transition.

Our pension system, and the wider system of social security of which it is a part, was founded on the principles of reciprocity, justice and fairness. I fail to see anything just, fair or reciprocal in the treatment of the WASPI women by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Government have rejected many opportunities to deliver a fair settlement for WASPI women, and by accelerating the changes they have embedded unfairness. To add insult to injury, they insist on ignoring and trivialising the issue.

Last week the Minister, who is with us today, refused to use the phrase “working-class” in what passed for an answer to my question on the subject, and argued that



“we are all working now.”—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2017; Vol. 620, c. 1171.]

I take issue with that premise. In Newcastle, unemployment stands at 5.4% of the economically active population, which is almost twice the national average, and that figure is rising year on year. The figures are even bleaker for older adults. Nationally, the employment rate for people aged 50 to 64 is only 70%. Last Thursday—the same day I asked the Minister my question—the DWP published a guide to help employers hire older workers, noting that three out of four retiring men and two thirds of women have not worked for five or more years. So we are not all working now. Perhaps the Minister was not informed that that was a priority for her Department: hardly an example of joined-up Government.

Irrespective of whether the Minister believes that we are all working now, the conditions that we work in are not equal. Perhaps the Minister should consider that not all women were so fortunate as she was, staying in full-time education until the age of 22—[*Interruption.*]—Twenty-one. The Minister corrects me. And immediately starting work as a researcher for an MEP who happened to be her father. I do not want to make assumptions, so perhaps the Minister will clarify whether she considers the job working for her father, or a subsequent one as chief executive officer of the National Pony Society, to have been manual labour.

One of the women who got in touch with me told me:

“The Conservative Government has never had pocket money, just blank cheques—they have no idea about the real world.”

I will leave it to others to decide whether that is a fair depiction, but it is obvious that the Government have not done enough to help the women. Talk of a Government who work for working people would be laughable were it not such a serious subject.

Whenever such issues are raised, we are told that we live in a country with a social security system that prevents changes such as the change in pension age from leading to hardship. If the Government seriously believe that our social security system—gutted under Tory changes since 2010—is providing adequately for the women, perhaps it is true that

“they have no idea about the real world.”

However, I will give the Minister the opportunity to demonstrate her understanding of reality by asking her: first, does she acknowledge the existence of working-class women? Secondly, does she acknowledge that although many more of us may be working now, working-class women, who often face the challenges of poverty predominantly in manual trades, have specific experiences? Thirdly, does she acknowledge that working-class women were more likely to start working earlier, and to work in jobs that take a higher toll on the body? Fourthly, does she acknowledge that working-class women are more likely to die younger and to suffer more ill health in retirement? Fifthly, does she acknowledge that they are more likely to be more dependent on the state pension, not having benefited from subsidised work pensions? Does she agree that those five factors make it much more likely that they will not benefit from their retirement to the extent that more privileged groups do, and that the state pension changes are therefore more unjust? Will she commit to considering transitional arrangements for WASPI women? Will she commit to working with the Treasury to announce a solution to the dire predicament in which so many women have been left in the forthcoming Budget?

I called this debate on behalf of all women whose lives have been blighted owing to the ill-considered and discriminatory nature of the changes. As I started with the example of a constituent, I would now like to end with the experience of another working-class woman who, to my great regret, did not live long enough to be a constituent of mine: my mother.

My mother was born in the 1920s in the depths of another great depression when there was no national health service. She grew up in Newcastle in great poverty. Of her six siblings, only one survived into adulthood. Five died of the diseases of poverty: diseases that, in the absence of the national health service, destroyed the lives of so many and had consequences much later in life, causing health inequalities that the health service cannot eradicate—certainly not one as underfunded as the NHS is now. I am sure that that childhood poverty influenced her life expectancy. She died before her 70th birthday, but had lived—cheerfully—with ill health and disability for two decades previously.

It is absolutely iniquitous to imagine that my mother would have had perhaps just three or four years of pension—and that in great ill health—because the Government cannot recognise a fundamental injustice, and, indeed, do not even recognise the existence of working-class women. The debate is, however, not about my mother's experience, or even Mrs Tenniswood's experience; it is about the experiences of tens of thousands of working-class women whose lives and retirement have been blighted by changes that were ill-advised and poorly implemented, and in which they and their experiences were not considered.

I want to close my remarks with a small selection of quotations from the appeals that I received. One woman said:

“Stress has made me so ill, physically exhausted and mentally struggling to survive”.

Another said:

“Being too disabled to work is humiliating enough without being made to suffer further humiliation at my age. Hopes, dreams and careful plans to enjoy our retirement shattered. Savings all gone, future bleak! No letter, no notice.”

This came from another woman:

“I am at times very depressed as it felt like I had done a prison sentence for 44 years then, just before my release date, it was extended another six years.”

I came into politics to fight for people like those women, but I am not simply fighting on their behalf. I am fighting with them, side by side.

Another WASPI woman said:

“My mother welded fan blades for Ford Dagenham and it was women who all stood shoulder to shoulder that achieved equal pay for women.

Nothing is ever impossible if women are united in their cause.”

I believe that to be the case and I plead with the Minister to heed the voices of the thousands of working-class WASPI women who are crying out for justice.

3.21 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) and congratulate her on bringing the debate forward today. We are again focusing on the effect of the state pension age on working-class women. The motion of course concerns those women who were informed, with little notice, that the pension they expected

[Patricia Gibson]

to receive at 60 had moved further away from them, upsetting their plans for retirement, and perhaps interfering with caring responsibilities, or disrupting plans to spend time with grandchildren or allow sons and daughters to enter or re-enter the workforce. As has been pointed out, those women, whom the motion refers to as working-class, can most easily be identified as women doing demanding physical jobs for low pay. They are jobs requiring good health; perhaps there is an expectation that workers will stand or be on their feet for long hours, or perhaps physical strength is required.

As we have heard quite graphically, many women in their 60s cannot easily do such jobs. When we are in our 60s, like it or not, we are past our physical best. We expect to be able to take our lives a little easier after a lifetime of work—and why should the women in question not expect that, given that their contract with the state was, “Pay in and you will get paid out at 60”? Any change to that has to be planned well in advance. The women were not paid that courtesy or afforded that justice. This is the sixth or seventh debate—I have lost count—on the injustices done to the women affected by the changes. They are angry, because those controlling the levers of power seem not to be listening, because those with the power to put things right are stonewalling them and those speaking up for them, and because they are having to fight, organise, march, demonstrate and agitate to win back what was so wrongfully and cruelly taken from them, in some cases with shockingly—appallingly—little notice.

I believe that the women are right to be angry. I suspect that many of those taking part in the debate are angry on their behalf. Amid all the important and tragic things on the political agenda—all the carry-on about Brexit, the use of EU nationals as bargaining chips, the turning away of child refugees from war-torn countries, and nuclear missiles that do not appear to project in the direction in which they are fired—the women are determined that their voices will not be drowned out. The UK Government appear to believe that if they sit tight, the women will go away. They will not; they have nowhere to go. They need their pensions so that they can live with dignity and some kind of peace of mind. It is not pin money that they seek; it is their rightful pension, which they need to pay their bills, put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. The Government hope and believe that they will go away. Where should they go—and where can they go, without justice?

Thousands of pounds have been robbed from those women, who must have seemed an easy target for the austerity agenda. If the Government want to equalise pensions, fine. No one here is arguing against that, but it should have been done properly, by which I mean that the Government should have given all the women fair and proper notice. That is it. It is not complicated and it should not be controversial. As it is, women who have worked all their lives, often suffering pay discrimination relative to their male counterparts, are in the appallingly cruel situation of being denied the dignity and financial support that they need and deserve in retirement—the pensions that they contributed to.

If those contracts with the state can be so easily disregarded or altered without proper notice, what does it say about citizens’ relationship with the state? I am sure that if a private pension provider had behaved as

the Government are doing now, the pensions ombudsman would have something to say on the matter. It looks as if the only recourse to the women who have been robbed of their rightful pensions is through the courts. It is a disgrace that they have been left with that option in the face of an intractable, stubborn and heartless lack of movement from the Government. I wish all the women well in their fight for justice, and I and my party will stand beside them as long as justice is denied them.

The dispute is not about affordability, as the UK Government often like to pretend. The women contributed to the state, paid their taxes and did all the things that they believed they should as good citizens. If every global organisation, every business and every individual in the UK paid their taxes—instead of which, so many of them do all they can to avoid it—there would be more money to go round. Instead, as too often happens, ordinary citizens at the bottom of the heap are punished, while those who actively avoid contributing to the Treasury appear to be protected. People are alienated from politics. They feel that the system is always stacked against ordinary, hard-working, decent folk who go quietly about their business. There is no starker example of that than the treatment of women born in the 1950s.

The WASPI women will not be quiet. They will continue to raise their voices to cry out against the injustice, and we in the Scottish National party will cry out with them. These women will not allow their quest for justice to be dismissed. Wasps can sting and the Government need to watch out. All that is required is for justice, decency and honesty to prevail, and the argument will end. It is not too late for the Government to do the right thing—giving the women the pensions they are due; no more, no less. Then let us put the whole sorry, awful business behind us, so that they can enjoy their well-deserved retirement, after a lifetime of work.

3.28 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I had not intended to speak this afternoon, Mr Ffello, because I expected the debate to be over-subscribed. I am sad that more hon. Members are not here to speak on behalf of working-class women. I have looked into the figures, and I understand that 2,410 women in my constituency are affected by the changes. The figure for the whole city of Glasgow is 23,100 women. That is no small number; it is a huge number, in a city that has had heavy industry and long-standing economic deprivation. Those women have worked damn hard for that money and they deserve the pension they thought they would get. I am hugely disappointed that successive Governments did not do more to notify them. Those who got in touch with me at my surgeries and through my office spoke of their shock that they were not told that they would not have the life they had planned for their expected retirement after working so hard in so many heavy industries for low pay, sometimes with pay discrimination. They were shocked not to be told and to find themselves without the retirement they had expected.

The number of women who have been in touch with me is nowhere near 2,410. We can all do more every day to make sure all the women affected know that we are on their side and fighting for them. I pay tribute to the WASPI campaign in Glasgow, which is doing so much to achieve that. I was proud to go to the demonstration in George Square last year, but there were not 23,000 people there that day. This is the tip of the iceberg. The women

are finding out not from the Government, but through the WASPI campaign, social media, their families and friends and their own networks. That is the sad thing. The campaign is great, but it demonstrates how much these women have been let down.

One woman I must mention—or I will be in serious trouble—is my mother-in-law. She has worked all her life and has had the goalposts moved not once but twice, with loss of access to her pension for six years. She had planned and worked hard for her pension and it is hugely disappointing that the Government have left her in this situation.

**Ian Blackford:** One thing that annoys me is that the Government keep saying that no woman has suffered an increase in their pensionable age of more than 18 months. That is patently not true. As my hon. Friend has just said, some women have seen a six-year increase in their pensionable age. The Government should start telling the truth.

**Alison Thewliss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I commend his campaigning on this issue. Women have been cheated and it is entirely unfair. The Government expect many of them to seek work. I met a constituent outside Bridgeton Jobcentre a few weeks ago when campaigning against its closure. She was 62 and she was in absolute pieces because she had been called to the jobcentre. She had moved between employment support allowance and jobseeker's allowance. She is not fit to work. She had been through a traumatic experience. Her daughter had died. She has poor physical and mental health and she told me about her pension age, which has added insult to injury. She has been through enough in her life. She deserves peace of mind and time to enjoy the retirement she should have.

Instead, at the age of 62, the Government expect that woman to go out and seek work, which, given the condition she is in, is pretty unlikely. Having spoken to her, I cannot see that many employers would consider her a good employee prospect, given her circumstances and the experience she has had in life. What employer will say, "Yes, we will take her on. She may be here for a couple of years, if that, because her health is poor, so she might not be here for long."? Sadly, she is not a good prospect. She has worked all her life and she is tired. She is done and she deserves the time and peace she thought she would have. She deserves a dignified retirement.

Life expectancy in the east end of Glasgow is significantly lower than in other parts of the country and other parts of Glasgow. On the train from Bridgeton to the west end, there is a huge gap of eight to 10 years in the life expectancy of people on the same train line because the heavy industry and its legacy has meant that some women have suffered ill health all their lives. Some have suffered as a result of the industries their husbands worked in. Women were expected to launder their husband's clothes and have suffered asbestos-related conditions. That has not been recognised well enough. These women have worked very hard and they deserve a dignified retirement.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) on securing this important debate. I, too, have WASPI women in my constituency with poorer health and shorter lives who are worried about their future and have health inequalities or caring issues.

The Government have looked at transitional arrangements and want to provide dignity in old age. However, I am slightly concerned that the tone of this debate is writing off women at the age of 62 from having hope and opportunity. I have met some great women in my constituency surgeries who, with help and support, have found opportunities. I am looking for some balance in the argument, much as I have great sympathy with many of my constituents.

**Alison Thewliss:** The hon. Lady is correct. Some women are able to work, want to work and do work. Some do not want to retire, but want to keep working, and that is great for them. I knew women when I was a councillor for eight years before becoming an MP who want to work, are part of their community and want to contribute. That is fine if they are able to, but not all women are able to. We must think of them and look after them all the more, because they have given so much during their lives.

**Chi Onwurah:** The hon. Lady is making an excellent contribution, but my intervention relates to the previous one. I have had two jobs that I have really enjoyed—Member of Parliament and engineer—and I hope to continue working into my seventies. Does the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) agree that my mother's generation and the WASPI woman generation did not have our opportunities? Most of the Members of Parliament here are women. The previous generation did not have the opportunity to build up the sort of pension fund that we have and they did not have the opportunities for careers that give fulfilment without manual effort late in life. We should recognise that.

**Alison Thewliss:** The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. Some women have had opportunities stifled throughout their lives. They were not given the chance to go off and have the careers they wanted. My grandmother was forced to leave school. I have her school report and she was one of the brightest in her class, but her family said she had to go out and work and not stay on at school or go on to further education.

That has been the life path for many women. It is what they have done. During their working lives they have not spent as much time as they would have liked with their children, but they saw their retirement as an opportunity to get that back, to look after their grandchildren and to enjoy that experience instead of being forced to go out to work at all hours to try to bring in a wage. The Government should at least acknowledge the impact of that, particularly on families in poorer areas where childcare is not as available or is too expensive. These are women who were hoping to make a contribution to their families, providing childcare so that their children could go out to work and bring in an income.

We need to think about the contribution those women have made to society in the round and the debt we owe them. I urge the Government in the Budget in a few weeks to see what transitional arrangements can be put in place and what can be done to give those women the fair retirement they deserve.

3.37 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle



[*Ian Blackford*]

upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for securing this debate and putting across vividly the impact on women in her constituency. My hon. Friends the Members for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) spoke about the human cost of what has happened and the fact that so many women have been denied what is rightfully theirs.

I dearly wish that none of us were here today because the case has been made time after time, and it is time that the Government started to take notice. The phrase, “doing the right thing” has been used, but when reflecting on all that has gone on, not just all our debates but the 245 Members of Parliament who have lodged petitions on behalf of the WASPI women, the Government must respond to the pressures those women have been under.

What we cannot get away from is that the women rightly feel let down and that they have not had adequate communication. The point has been made, and no one disagrees that equalisation should take place, but it must happen fairly. This affects so many women—2.6 million throughout the UK and 243,900 in my own country of Scotland. Many of those women are working-class and have faced particular pressures. There is an opportunity here today for the Government to admit that a wrong has been done and that effective notice was not given of an increase in pensionable age, and to recognise that the process of increasing pensionable age must be slowed down. It must be slowed down before it is too late.

I want to pick up on the issue of a pension being a right. Frankly, I am sick fed up of hearing the Government say that this is not a right but a benefit. They cannot get away with weasel words, because that is all they are, Minister. All these women, including many of the women sitting here and the women from Newcastle upon Tyne Central, have paid 42 years-worth of national insurance contributions. If that does not give them a right to a pension, I do not know what does. It really is about time that the Government accepted their moral and ethical responsibilities and stopped hiding behind the language that this is not a contractual obligation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said, if what has been done had been done by private pension providers, you can bet your boots that the ombudsman would have been involved. You can bet your boots that those pension providers would have been taken to court, so for once, when you stand up this afternoon—I appreciate that you are not the Pensions Minister and are here in another guise. I apologise for using the word “you”, Mr Ffello. I am asking the Minister to recognise that this is not about benefits. It is about women who have paid in, and it is about time that they got their just rewards.

We often hear that the issue is affordability, and the point was made about austerity. The Government cannot run away from the fact that there is a national insurance fund and that fund is sitting, in year 2016-17, with a surplus of more than £30 billion. We have heard about mitigation, and different proposals have been made. We in the SNP have tried to contribute to that by commissioning our own research—the Landman Economics report, which was published last year—and it has been ridiculed and brought into question by the Government.

I have always made it clear that our favoured option, option 2 in the report, which calls for the slowing down of the increase in pensionable age, which would take a further two and a half years, would cost, in the lifetime of this Parliament—I stress “in this Parliament”—an additional £8 billion, but the Government have told us that we are wrong and the figure is £30 billion. The Government should sit down with me and go through our calculations, which are based on the Treasury model. They need to stop traducing the SNP and admit that the £8 billion figure is correct and that they can meet that cost out of the surplus that they have today in the national insurance fund. I say that because the payments into the national insurance fund have come from these women. This is about their entitlement and the fact that in the course of this Parliament, the Government could easily meet that obligation. When will the Government start to listen and actually do the right thing?

Thanks to freedom of information requests, we learnt that the DWP began writing to women born between April 1950 and April 1955 only in April 2009 and did not complete that process until February 2012. It wrote to women to inform them about changes in legislation going back to the Pensions Act 1995, but they had taken 14 years to start the formal notification process. It was 14 years after the legislation had been passed before the Government bothered to write to people. Taking 14 years to begin informing women that a pension that they had paid for was to be deferred is quite something. Can we imagine the outcry if a private pension provider behaved in such a manner? There would be an outcry in this House. Considering that entitlement to a state pension is based on national insurance contributions, the Government have an obligation to act in a fair manner. They have changed the entitlement to something women have paid in for with an expectation of retiring at age 60, and when the goalposts were moved, the Government could not get round to informing the women in a timely manner.

A woman born on 6 April 1953, who under the previous legislation would have retired on 6 April 2013, would have received a letter from the DWP in January 2012 with the bombshell that she would now be retiring on 6 July 2016—three years and three months later than she might have expected, but with only 15 months’ notice. We are talking about 15 months’ written notice that what she thought was a contract the Government had willingly ripped up. That is exactly why the Government have a duty to act: women born in the 1950s have not been fairly treated.

The lawyers Bindmans have published a guide to DWP maladministration in the WASPI women’s case, and let us be in no doubt that it is maladministration that we are talking about in this instance. The paper is a damning indictment of a failure to communicate effectively and directly with the women involved. It refers to the events that led to a change in women’s pensionable age, beginning with a White Paper in December 1993 that stated:

“In developing its proposals for implementing the change the Government has paid particular attention to the need to give people enough time to plan ahead and to phase the change in gradually.”

There is not much there I would not agree with, but when we accept the need for people to plan ahead, we need to write and tell them. The intent was there in the White Paper in 1993, yet it was 2009 before the Government acted.

Then there is the issue of phasing in gradually. I would not define that as increasing women's pensionable age by three months for each month that now passes. The pensionable age will increase by three months in the month of February and by another three months in March. That is not gradual. It is scandalous that women's pensionable age is increasing so rapidly. It is not within the spirit of what the Government outlined in their original White Paper.

In October 2002, while giving evidence to a Select Committee, the DWP suggested that the role of the state was

"to provide clear and accurate information about what pensions will provide so that people will understand how much they can expect at retirement before it is too late to do something about it".

How does the statement

"before it is too late to do something about it"

equate with the 15 months' notice that women were given? It was far too late, and the DWP must accept that women were not given appropriate notice, and must put in place mitigation. I might add that it was stated that the lead-in time in the original White Paper in 1993 allowed plenty of time for people to adjust their plans, but people can do so only if they are aware of it.

We also had the DWP public policy statement from March 2002, which stated:

"It is widely accepted that the department has a duty to give information or advice to inform the public about any new policies and developments that may affect them and crucially keep them informed on a continuing basis on their rights and responsibilities. It would be unreasonable for the department not to do this."

I could not agree more. Where, then, were the letters to the women to inform them of the changes? This was 2002. The DWP has to take responsibility for that failure to communicate and, crucially, for the lack of time that women have had to prepare for an increase in their state pension age. Rather than recognising that women deserved to be communicated with directly, the DWP issued leaflets headlined "Equality in State Pension Age". Can anybody in this Chamber remember those leaflets? No? I did not think so. I do not recall seeing them.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** You're not a woman!

**Ian Blackford:** It is interesting that a Government Member is actually laughing about this, because that defines what the problem is. There are women who are really struggling, and the Government laugh. You should apologise and you should accept responsibility for this and stop demeaning the women—

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Order. The word "you" refers to the occupant of the Chair.

**Ian Blackford:** I apologise, Mr Ffello, but you can understand the anger that the women feel. A Member of Parliament on the Government Benches laughing when we are discussing this important issue is beneath contempt, and the Member should actually stand and apologise to the women who have been affected by this, rather than sitting there smugly as he is.

As I mentioned, it is no surprise that women were unaware of the changes because when the DWP commissioned research in 2004 it highlighted that only 2% of respondents mentioned that they had been notified

of changes to the state pension age via a leaflet. Perhaps the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) wants to rise and try to defend that—quite frankly, it is indefensible. It is an insult that the Government at the time thought that changes affecting a woman's retirement age could be dealt with by a leaflet. That is an abrogation of responsibility and each and every Member who refuses to do something is culpable.

We should all receive an annual statement from the DWP on our expected entitlement, just as we do from private pension providers. Why has that not been happening? Do the Government not know where we all live? *[Laughter.]* It is a fair question. Why were the women not written to? Why have we not had an answer to that question? Why did it take all the years that it did? The case is not defensible—it is shameful—and the way the Government still refuse to accept responsibility is shameful.

The failure to communicate was highlighted by a DWP publication in 2004 called "Public awareness of State Pension age equalisation", which found that only 43% of all women affected by the increase in state pensionable age were aware of the impact on them. If the Government accept that women were not informed in a timely manner and therefore did not have time to react, why do the Government not accept their responsibilities?

We also know—you couldn't make this up—that the Government sent out 17.8 million letters to men and women between May 2003 and November 2006 on automatic state pension forecasts but, wait for it, they did not contain any information about the state pension age. That is quite remarkable. Letters were written, but they were just the wrong letters—they did not have the important information. They said, "To find out more about the state pension age for women, please see 'Pensions for women: your guide'. See page 10 for details on how you can get a copy of this guide." That is no way to convey information. The Government should have communicated accurate, clear and transparent information. That was another massive failure to communicate.

At some point, rather than hand wringing, the Government have to take responsibility, because 2.6 million WASPI women have been let down. I am going to wind up because I realise that time is pressing. Research in 2011 by the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing found that by 2008 only 43% of women affected by the change were aware of it. Just think about this: over half of women who were expecting a pension at age 60 were going to be denied that. I cannot imagine the shock when they realised that they were not going to get what they thought was rightfully theirs. It is not the women who are at fault; they have paid in, expecting a pension. It is the Government who have let them down and it is the Government who have a moral and ethical responsibility to do something about it.

**Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Blackford:** I will happily give way.

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Order. May I gently suggest to hon. Members that, while I appreciate that there has been other business in the Chamber, we are on the wind-ups and Members really ought to be here for the debate rather than coming for the wind-ups? I will allow

[*Robert Flello (in the Chair)*]

my hon. Friend a very brief intervention on this one occasion, because I am sure he has been in the Chamber previously up until now, but I remind Members that they really need to be in for the entirety of the debate.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I will be very brief. I apologise, Mr Flello; I was actually over in the Chamber because there were some important debates there as well and I cannot be in two places at once even if I would like to be. This is a timely debate because next month we will have the Budget. If the Chancellor can find billions for high-speed rail and other issues, surely he can find a couple of billion to give these women a decent life.

**Ian Blackford:** That is a very good point. We can find the money for high-speed rail. We can find, at the drop of a hat, £170 billion or more for Trident renewal. We are even due to debate the renewal of this place. If I were given a choice, I would want to make sure that the WASPI women were compensated and not that £7 billion was spent on reforming this place. That can wait, but the WASPI women need their money and they need it today.

The DWP told the Select Committee on Work and Pensions last year:

“Until 2009, direct communication with people affected by increases in state pension age was very limited.”

The Government must reflect on that and on the fact that women have not been properly informed. The Pensions Minister, in a parliamentary answer to me on 23 November last year, stated:

“The Government has committed not to change the legislation relating to State Pension age for those people who are within 10 years of reaching it. This provides these individuals with the certainty they need to plan for the future. We recognise the importance of ensuring people are aware of any changes to their State Pension age”.

We have put an option to the Government that is affordable and is about doing the right thing. The Government should agree with us. Frankly, I do not want to see any of us back here again. It really is about time that when the Minister rises today, she recognises the wrong that has been done. For the love of God, do something—do the right thing.

**Robert Flello (in the Chair):** Order. May I remind the Front-Bench speakers that in 90-minute debates it is customary to make 10-minute speeches? I am being more generous because we are not so pushed for time, but 10 minutes is expected and not what we just had. Thank you.

3.55 pm

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Flello, for your excellent chairmanship—very stern, but firm. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for securing this vital debate, which is so essential for securing a dignified retirement for some 2.5 million women. Her speech was factual, relevant and presented the arguments succinctly. I also congratulate the hon. Members who are here from the SNP for their elegant speeches and the contribution they have made today.

The injustices currently being experienced by women born in the 1950s at the hands of the Government are a travesty and it is right that they are discussed here today and at every other given opportunity. We must not allow this Government to turn a blind eye. Today it is especially poignant that the debate focuses on working-class women who are feeling the effects of this injustice so acutely. Many of the women have no savings and are likely to be working in physically demanding jobs. I am of an age that means I need to work a lot longer than I originally intended, but I am very fortunate—I have a clean job that involves a lot of sitting down. When I was in my 30s I was a dinner lady in a special school. That involved lifting children and young people, to allow them to go to the bathroom or have their lunch, and all the other things that have to be done for children with special needs. I could not do that job today; I physically would not be able to do it. There are women today doing heavy jobs, not for the luxuries of life but to live life.

There are those of us on this side of the House who are passionate about helping these women, and indeed there are also some on the Government Benches who lobby for fair play and justice for them. However, our efforts to date have been frustrated by the Government's reluctance to engage in productive dialogue. At the end of last year, Labour's suggestion to extend pension credit to those who needed it was turned down by the Secretary of State and his Pensions Minister. That would have extended support to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable women.

Our suggestion that the Minister set up a special proactive helpline for the women affected to ensure that they all had access to the social security system, which is claimed to be sufficient to meet their needs, also went unheeded. Perhaps the Minister needs reminding of the hardship that the poorly managed changes that this Government have put in place have caused to more than 2.6 million WASPI women. The Minister argues that the social security system will step in to support women struggling to make ends meet as a result of the changes. May I remind the House that that is the same social security system that this Government have spent seven years savaging, with swingeing cuts to universal credit and employment and support allowance alongside sharpened conditionality measures in a punitive and discredited work assessment system?

In our work to support the WASPI women and WASPI Voice we have heard from many women who have been left in dire straits by the pension age changes but cannot obtain sufficient social security support. I hear every day, as I am sure many Members do, of hardship cases that are beyond belief—women going to food banks, women losing their homes, women being forced to move in with their children because they cannot afford to live in their own homes. One woman whose pension age was moved back and could no longer afford to pay the rent has spiralled into debt and is on the verge of losing her home. Another is struggling to keep her sick husband out of care so that they can hang on to their family home, without the state pension income that she was planning to use to keep them both going in her retirement.

By now, most Members of this House will have heard of similar cases—repeated reminders of the Government's failure. Thankfully, an army of campaigners are now planning to work with us to keep the pressure on the



Government. Those groups stand shoulder to shoulder in the message that this Government have got it wrong and should reconsider. The two main campaigning groups, Women Against State Pension Inequality and WASPI Voice, both agree with equalisation of the state pension age; where they differ from the Government is on the means by which that should be achieved.

Lessons must now be learned from the failure to communicate the changes to state pension timetables to those affected. However, that does not go far enough as a means of redress. Fair transitional arrangements should be put in place to support the most vulnerable. The Opposition have suggested plans, but the Government have dismissed all suggestions of measures for amelioration. One of the WASPI campaign groups has decided to mount a legal action against the Government; its representation is preparing to pursue maladministration complaints against the Department for Work and Pensions. Labour proposals call on the Government to extend pension credit to those who would have been eligible under the 1995 timetable, so that women affected by the chaotic mismanagement of equalisation will be offered some support until they retire.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I beg your indulgence, Mr Ffello; I have been serving in a Bill Committee as the Opposition Whip. On the point about fairness, my hon. Friend will be aware that last week, on the Floor of the House, I asked the Prime Minister about my constituent Dianah Kendall and the impact of the state pension age changes on her life. The Prime Minister's response was that no woman would wait longer than 18 months, but the reality is that many women will wait five, six or even seven years. That does an utter injustice to what she said on the Floor of the House.

**Carolyn Harris:** I repeat my previous comments about chaotic mismanagement; it obviously goes to the top.

Our proposals would make hundreds of thousands of WASPI women eligible for up to £156 a week, but we will not stop there. We are developing further proposals to support as many WASPI women as possible. We are considering proactive ways to support the most vulnerable now. The proposals will be financially credible, based on sound evidence and supported by WASPI women.

It was disappointing that the Government did not use the opportunity provided by the autumn statement to do anything to support those women. It was equally disappointing that our amendment to the Pension Schemes Bill, which would have implemented our pension credit proposals immediately, was unsuccessful. My party believes in standing up for the most vulnerable, which is what we are doing today and will do tomorrow, the day after, next week and next year. We will continue to support the WASPI women in this fight. I made a personal promise in the Chamber to raise this issue at every opportunity, and I stand firm in that commitment. My party and I call on this Government to stop burying their heads in the sand and do the right thing by these women. Give the women affected the respect that they deserve: act now and rectify this injustice.

4.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Ffello. I congratulate you on having chaired this debate in a fair and exemplary manner,

and for allowing those Members who were busy elsewhere in the House this afternoon the opportunity to speak, even if just briefly in an intervention. Important debates have been taking place this afternoon, and important work has been done in Bill Committees.

It is only right that I should take this opportunity to thank the hon. Members for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for being here. I know that they have been much occupied with the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington) in the Pension Schemes Bill Committee, which explains why I am here instead of him. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for opening the debate and hon. Members from all parties—and all parts of the British Isles, with the exception of Northern Ireland—who have contributed. It is most unusual for the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) not to be present.

In recent decades, there has been a huge shift in how people spend later life. We are living longer, staying healthier for longer and leading far more active lifestyles, regardless of our age. More and more people are proving that age need not be a barrier to achieving great things. Some of the Olympians whom we sent out to Rio last summer were among the oldest athletes on record. I, for one, celebrate the fact that age increasingly places no bounds on those wishing to achieve new goals, try new things and play an active part in society.

The new state pension was introduced as a key reform to the UK pension system. The Government recognised that the pension system needed to change in response to the demographic and behavioural shifts of recent decades. For most people, we know that work is beneficial. It not only provides an income and a bedrock for saving, giving people greater control over their lives but crucially, the evidence shows that for most people, being in work can be immensely beneficial for both physical and mental health. The social and cultural benefits of remaining in work are sorely under-recognised. This Government's pensions strategy does not focus only on the benefits to people. We know that the skills, experience and talents that older workers bring to organisations are invaluable. Older workers still have an incredible amount to offer.

It is also true that the living standards of pensioners have risen significantly, but we must remember that not all pensioners are in the same position. More than 1 million pensioners rely solely on the state for their income. That is why we introduced the triple lock in 2011 and have committed to continuing it over this Parliament. As well as guaranteeing increases to the state pension, we have fundamentally reformed it. Under our reforms, people will have a much better idea of what their pension will be, bringing more certainty and clarity where previously there was confusion. That design is integral to the Government's ambition to provide a better foundation on which people can plan and build for a secure retirement. We want to make life easier and more comfortable for people in retirement.

**Ian Blackford:** How can people plan and build for retirement with 15 months' notice of an increase in their retirement age?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman will of course know that I am referring to the new state pension. That is exactly why we are introducing it, so that people have

[*Caroline Nokes*]

more certainty and clarity than previously. As well as being simpler, the new state pension will give more to many of those traditionally less well served in the past. By 2030, around three quarters of new pensioners will get a higher state pension than if the old system had continued. More than 3 million women will get around £550 more each year. It is estimated that women reaching state pension age in 2016-17 will receive more state pension on average over their lifetime than women ever have before. We have also created new pension freedoms that mean that savers have more control over their money and can use it in ways that suit them. In the new pensions marketplace, we are helping people make the right decisions for them through things such as Pension Wise, which provides free, impartial information.

I am pleased that Members from all parties agree that it is right that we have equalised the state pension age for men and women. It is part of the DWP's wider objective of eliminating gender inequalities in social security provision.

**Patricia Gibson:** Does the Minister believe that the women whom we are debating were given sufficient notice to make correct and proper plans for their retirement?

**Caroline Nokes:** If the hon. Lady will give me time, I will come to exactly that point later in my contribution.

It is important that we all recognise that the age at which we receive the state pension must rise. Life expectancy continues to rise, and it is a key priority for this Government to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension system. For that reason, the Government have introduced regular reviews of the state pension age. The issue is also likely to feature heavily in the Cridland review, which will be published in the coming months.

We recognise that employment prospects for women have changed dramatically since the state pension age was first set in 1940, especially for the women affected by the acceleration of the state pension age. Alongside the age increases under the new state pension, we have made huge progress in opening up employment opportunities for women and older workers. Since the 1970s, women have seen repeated increases in employment rates in later life compared with their male counterparts. The number of older women aged 50 to 64 who were in work in 2016 stood at more than 4 million, which is a record high. Approximately 150,000 more older women are in work than this time last year.

**Carolyn Harris:** Does the Minister acknowledge that women who are currently in work may be there not because they want to be, but because they have to be?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Lady makes a valid point, but I would argue that there are also many men, and indeed many younger people, who have to be in work. We want to encourage more people to be in work and to play their part in society. As I said earlier, work is an important part of wellbeing. Work in itself provides emotional, physical and mental wellbeing effects.

The rate of employment for women aged between 60 and 64 is more than 40%—another record high.  
[*Interruption.*]

**Chi Onwurah:** Will the Minister give way?

**Caroline Nokes:** Well, I might if there were not a little private chat going on at the front of the Chamber. Still, I acknowledge that the hon. Lady is no part of that, so I give way.

**Chi Onwurah:** So far, the Minister's contribution has not really reflected what this debate is about. I remind her that I asked her five specific questions and that I observed that this is a debate about working-class women. She has yet to use the word "working-class"; I hope she will before she sits down.

**Caroline Nokes:** I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the specific title of the debate, which I believe I am covering: "That this House has considered the effect of state pension changes". I have dealt with the new state pension thoroughly, and I hope that we will all acknowledge that we have indeed had a significant change with the introduction of the new state pension.

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Mr Ffello. I suggest, with regret, that we have not actually discussed the motion in front of us today. Unless the Minister does that in the short time that she has available, when we come to the appropriate point in the debate I will have no option but to move that we have not considered this matter.

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** I am not totally convinced that that was a point of order. Let us see how the debate continues.

**Caroline Nokes:** I hope you will forgive me, Mr Ffello, if I take the opportunity to ask you for some advice. Do I have another 18 minutes or so? I certainly have several pages still to get through.

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Indeed, although I would like to be able to call the mover of the motion for a minute or so at the end.

**Caroline Nokes:** Sixteen minutes, then.

In addition, independent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that employment rates for women aged 60 and 61 have increased as a direct result of the changes in state pension age.

**Ian Blackford:** I must respectfully ask the Minister whether she has any idea of the disrespect that she is showing to the WASPI women by refusing to directly address the point that we are discussing. It has been pointed out that women have not been given effective notice. What are the Government going to do about it?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making another intervention, but he will be aware that I have 15 minutes in which to come to that point, and I have really only just begun.

The Government recognise the particular barriers that women face to remaining in the workplace and we have been quite clear that more action is needed to address them. For instance, we know that women with more children tend to take longer career breaks, which can impact on their retirement income. We also know

that giving women the opportunities they need to continue working in later life, whether in a full-time or part-time role, is the best way in which we can help mitigate some of that impact, while of course making provision for those who may be unable to work or may have difficulty working. It is interesting to note that someone who draws on their pension pot at 65 instead of 55 and continues to receive average earnings for those extra years of working could increase their pension pot by half as much again. That is why we plan to do everything we can to change attitudes towards employing older female workers.

On a recent visit to the jobcentre in Eastbourne, I was struck by something that was said to me by a work coach who I met there. It was her view that women aged over 50 and seeking work were the most optimistic of the people she worked with and tried to place into jobs. It was that cohort who were the most open-minded and enthusiastic about trying new roles and learning new skills. My hon. Friend—and, indeed, neighbour—the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), who is no longer in her place, raised absolutely that point. Actually, older women have the most flexibility and, as work coaches have said to me, the most open-minded attitude to trying new roles and being prepared to take on new challenges regardless of age. That is immensely encouraging. It tells me that what the Government are doing through the fuller working lives strategy, which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central mentioned earlier and which was published last week, is the right course of action.

I have seen at first hand the value that offering older workers a new opportunity can have; it can truly transform their lives. I am proud of the commitment that I have witnessed from work coaches up and down the country. The hon. Lady might also recognise that the claimant count in Newcastle, which she referenced earlier, is down by 28% since 2010. The female employment rate in the UK now stands at 69.9%—a near-record high.

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Mr Ffello. May I ask for your guidance on whether what we are hearing from the Government is indeed in order, given the subject of this debate?

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Again, I do not think that that is a point of order; it is a matter for the debate.

**Caroline Nokes:** Hon. Members raised the increase in life expectancy. It has been experienced by all over the last few years, but it differs by occupation type—the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central was certainly right to point that out. Women aged 65 who worked in higher managerial and professional occupations are expected to live more than three years longer than those in routine or manual roles; for men, that difference is greater, at four years. However, women in manual occupations have a similar life expectancy at 65 to men in professional occupations. Life expectancy also varies across regions—the hon. Lady was correct to point that out—but it would be wholly impractical to vary state pension age across the country.

The fuller working lives strategy aims to increase the retention, retraining and recruitment of older workers by bringing about a change in the perceptions and attitudes of employers and by challenging views of

working in later life and retirement among individuals. As part of the strategy, the Government are taking account of the fact that people change jobs over their lifetimes. It is now extremely unusual for people to stay in one career throughout their entire working life.

**Patricia Gibson:** Does the Minister have anything to say to the women who are watching today, in the Gallery or at home, about the lack of notice that they were given and about how that has upset their retirement plans and put them in dire financial straits?

**Caroline Nokes:** I reassure that the hon. Lady that I will come to that point.

The fuller working lives strategy adopts a very new approach: it is led by employers, who rightly see themselves as the ones who understand the business case and can drive change. Specifically to support older claimants, the Department for Work and Pensions has introduced older claimant champions from April 2015 across each of its seven Jobcentre Plus groups. It plans to roll the initiative out to each of the 34 districts. These champions will work with work coaches and employers to raise the profile of that age group and highlight the benefits of employing older jobseekers. In addition, the Government Equalities Office continues to work with the Women's Business Council to tackle the outdated assumptions that some employers make about women, particularly mothers.

In “Building our Industrial Strategy”, our Green Paper published last month, the Government set out how we will test ambitious new approaches to encourage lifelong learning to help adults who want to upskill or move around the labour market during their career. However, we recognise that some women may wish to continue to work and are unable to do so, so we continue to spend £90 billion a year on working-age benefits in this country. The welfare system provides a safety net for those of working age, and there are a range of benefits tailored to individual circumstances. The system is designed to deal with the problems, such as unemployment, disability and coping with caring responsibilities, that affect those who are unable to work and are therefore in most need as they approach their state pension age.

**Ian Blackford:** I suggest to the Minister that she should stop wasting everybody's time and concede that she is not going to do anything, so that the WASPI women can get on with legal action and take the Government to court.

**Caroline Nokes:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has become so frustrated. He will be conscious that I could still fill another nine or 10 minutes or so. There are some very important points that I would like to make and I am sure that people will want to hear them. If he continues to chunter—[*Interruption.*]

**Robert Ffello (in the Chair):** Order. Continue, Minister.

**Caroline Nokes:** Thank you, Mr Ffello.

As I was saying, that is why we continue to spend £90 billion a year on working-age benefits to assist those in this country who are unable to work. For those



[*Caroline Nokes*]

seeking work, people in receipt of working-age benefits can access a range of support from Jobcentre Plus and tailored support from the Work programme.

Specifically, the evidence is clear, and we as a Government are clear, that work is the best route out of poverty. That is why this Government's approach has been about recognising the value and importance of work, to make work pay and to support people into work, while protecting the most vulnerable in society.

Our reforms are transforming lives. Today's labour market statistics show that we continue to have a record number of people in work—over 2.7 million more than in 2010. The number of workless households is down by 865,000, and the percentage of households in the social sector where no one works has fallen from 49% to 38%, which is a decrease of nearly 350,000 households.

We have made a real difference for women, with more than 1 million more women in work since 2010 and the highest rate of female employment on record. The gender pay gap is also at its lowest level since records began, and there are now 1.2 million women-led small and medium-sized enterprises, which is more than ever before. We are rightly proud of our record but recognise that there is more to do.

We had to equalise state pension age to eliminate gender inequalities in social security provision—it is the right thing to do—and we had to accelerate this process due to increases in longevity, in order to protect the long-term sustainability of state pension provision in this country.

We know that whenever things change, there have to be dividing lines, and I understand that the changes are most stark for those closest to the line. That is no different in this case. We understand that and the Government listened to the concerns expressed at the time. Therefore, a concession worth more than £1 billion was introduced, despite the fiscal situation, to lessen the impact of the changes on those worst affected. The concession reduced the delay that anyone would experience in claiming their state pension and benefited almost a quarter of a million women.

However, going further than that simply cannot be justified, given that the underlying imperative must be to focus public resources on those most in need. I have listened to Opposition Members, and I have heard and understood their concerns. However, let me be clear—we are making no further concessions on this issue. As well as being unaffordable, reversing the Pensions Act 1995 would create an anomaly, whereby women would be expected to work for less time than they work now, and it would be discriminatory to men. It is not practical to implement.

John Cridland's independent report on state pension age will consider wider factors that should—

**Chi Onwurah:** I certainly thank the Minister for finally coming to matters that are relevant to this debate and the people here. However, does she recognise the point that because the women we are discussing today started work earlier—at the age of 15, which is long before she or I started work—they are the generation who are working longer than any other generation? When she says that giving a further “concession” would mean that

they ended up working for less time than other women, does she not recognise that they have worked, and are working, for longer?

**Robert Flello (in the Chair):** Just before I call the Minister to continue, may I suggest that she perhaps speaks for only a couple more minutes?

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Lady also needs to reflect that these women are also living longer; we are all living longer.

As I was saying, the Cridland independent report is coming forward and will be published in March. It is part of the Government's review of state pension age, which is due in early 2017.

**Patricia Gibson** *rose—*

**Caroline Nokes:** I will not give way again; the Chairman has made it very clear that he wants me to conclude my remarks.

A number of points have been made today about communications; in particular, the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber has been quite forceful on this subject. He made the point that there were about 14 years between the decision being made and letters starting to go out. When he refers to “this Government”, I remind him that for the bulk of that time my party was not in Government, and if he wishes to lay the blame for a lack of communication, he might do well to direct it somewhere else.

We have continued this country's long record of raising the living standards of pensioners, through our commitment to the triple lock and our reforms of the state pension, and we are revolutionising the world of private pensions through auto-enrolment, which is for everyone. However, we want continue our work aimed at providing older workers with greater choice and greater security in retirement, which is at the heart of our fuller working lives strategy. The results speak for themselves. We not only continue to increase the employment prospects for women above the age of 60 drastically, but the new state pension provides people with greater freedom and greater choice, and dignity in retirement.

**Robert Flello (in the Chair):** I call Chi Onwurah to wind up the debate.

4.24 pm

**Chi Onwurah:** Thank you, Mr Flello, for calling me to speak again, and I congratulate you on your excellent chairing of this debate—if, indeed, we can call it a “debate”.

I thank the hon. Members from the Scottish National party and from my own party, in particular the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), for their contributions, and for highlighting the experiences of so many hundreds of thousands—indeed, millions—of WASPI women; the poverty they have experienced and, indeed, the betrayal that so many of them feel at the tearing-up of the contract between state and citizen.

While I thank the Minister for including some relevant parts in her contribution, they were relevant only inasmuch as they made clear the Government's total lack of

understanding of the experience of WASPI women, and that no further “concession”—as the Minister chose to call it, whereas I would call it basic justice—would be offered.

I also observe that the Minister went through her entire contribution without mentioning “working-class women”, which is in the title of the debate. These women have worked the longest and suffered the greatest indignities in facing challenges that the Minister and I know nothing of, with regard to discrimination, poverty and lack of opportunity. That the Minister, from her privileged position, should nevertheless refuse to offer any kind of support or consideration to the great women of this country, who have worked so hard and deserve

so much more from this place, I find absolutely unbelievable. Indeed, Mr Flello, I will sit down before I am forced to be disorderly in my condemnation of the Government’s position on this issue.

*Question put,*

That this House has considered the effect of state pension changes on working-class women.

*The Chair’s opinion as to the decision of the Question was challenged.*

*Question not decided (Standing Order No. 10(13)).*

4.27 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





# Written Statements

*Thursday 9 February 2017*

## CABINET OFFICE

### Government Transformation Strategy

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Ben Gummer):** Today the Government are publishing the “Government Transformation Strategy 2017 to 2020”. This strategy sets out the Government’s objectives to harness digital (the technologies, culture, skills and tools of the internet era) to transform the relationship between the citizen and state.

The “digital by default” services developed under the previous strategy have helped to establish the UK as a global leader in digital government. However, the opportunity to transform Government further, as well as the need to be able to respond quickly to new or changed priorities, mean that our current approach to digitally enabled transformation of Government needs to be accelerated and expanded.

The Government transformation strategy defines our vision and ambition for a Government that is “of the internet” rather than simply “on the internet”. It sets out how Government services, and other interactions with the public and businesses, will be improved and enhanced—both in terms of providing service to citizens and in gaining (and keeping) their trust. Digital is the best way of achieving this.

The strategy sets out five pillars for the future direction of Government:

Create shared platforms, components and reusable business capabilities: continuing with Government as a platform, reducing duplication, cost and increasing efficiency across Government.

Make better use of data: ensuring that Government data is properly managed, protected and (where non-sensitive) made available and shared effectively. To accelerate the transformation of Government, and ensure we retain public trust and confidence in our use of data, we will appoint a new Chief Data Officer for Government.

Business transformation: developing end-to-end services that meet the needs of their users across all channels, in co-ordination with a fundamental rethink of back-office operations.

Grow the right people, culture and skills: continuing to ensure that we have the right people, with the right skills and training, employed in the right place working in the right way.

Build better tools, processes and governance for civil servants: transforming the inside of the civil service to become an organisation that is digital by default.

One of the most important and challenging aspects of delivering transformed online services is identity assurance—establishing that the user is who they say they are and not someone pretending to be them. Gov.uk Verify, the Government’s online identity verification service, went live in May 2016. We will continue to enable individuals to prove their identity online and to access Government services securely and safely. To achieve this, we will work towards 25 million people having a gov.uk Verify account by the end of 2020.

This strategy also sets out the evolving role of the Government digital service to support, enable and assure transformation delivered by Government Departments. It provides the direction of travel and does not in and of itself constitute any additional spending commitments.

I will place a copy of this strategy document in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS469]

## TREASURY

### European Union Finances Statement

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** I am today laying before Parliament, the “European Union Finances 2016: statement on the 2016 EU Budget and measures to counter fraud and financial mismanagement” (Cmd 9400). This is a routine annual publication. It is the thirty sixth in the series. The statement gives details of revenue and expenditure in the 2016 European Union (EU) Budget, recent developments in EU financial management and measures to counter fraud against the EU Budget. It also includes a chapter and annex on the use of EU funds in the UK while we remain a member state.

[HCWS476]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Local Government Funding

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** Further to the points raised in the House yesterday on Surrey County Council and local government finance, I would like to take the opportunity to put some facts on the record.

Surrey County Council’s budget and council tax is a matter for the council. Surrey’s elected councillors voted through their 2017-18 budget on 7 February, based on the draft local government finance settlement. Surrey County Council has been clear that its budget decision—setting a level of council tax which is not above the referendum threshold—was its alone.

As part of the statutory draft local government finance settlement consultation, the Department for Communities and Local Government discusses local government funding with councils across the country, of all types and all political colours. This happens every year, and necessarily involves councils making direct representations to the Government.

DCLG will publish the final settlement later this month, and the House of Commons will then vote on it. This is entirely transparent, and detailed funding figures for every council are published as part of that process.

While the final settlement has yet to be approved, the Government are not proposing extra funding to Surrey County Council that is not otherwise provided or offered to other councils generally. There is no “memorandum of understanding” between Government and Surrey County Council. In the draft settlement published in December, Surrey’s core spending power is forecast to rise by 1.4% from 2015-16 to 2019-20. We believe this provides a sustainable base on which the council can plan ahead and allocate their £1.7 billion a year budget.

We are, however, conscious of the medium and long-term pressures that all councils face from a growing and ageing population. The Government are therefore delivering broader reforms to local government finance—through

bespoke devolution deals, the integration of health and social care, a fairer funding review, medium and longer-term reforms to support adult social care, and the move, from 2019-20, to 100% business rates retention across the country. All these reforms have been discussed in recent weeks with Surrey and other councils from across the country as part of the local government finance settlement process.

The Local Government Finance Bill that Parliament is at present considering will legislate to deliver the reforms to business rates. A number of pilots are already taking place from April 2017 in combined authorities and unitary councils across the country. These will take place in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, west midlands, west of England, Cornwall and Greater London. The Government plan to undertake further pilots in 2018-19, in areas without a devolution deal, including two-tier council areas. The nationwide roll-out will then take place across England in 2019-20.

Surrey County Council informed the Government that it wished to become a pilot area. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government told it that this was not possible for 2017-18, but said that, subject to due process and meeting the necessary criteria, it could participate in the 2018-19 pilot. All other councils will be free to apply to participate in these pilots, and the Government invite them to do so. The Department for Communities and Local Government has already held discussions about the 2018-19 pilots with several councils and it will be publishing more information shortly.

The Government's wider reforms to local government funding will make councils less dependent on money from Whitehall, ensuring all councils have strong incentives to support local jobs and local firms, and directly benefit from the proceeds of a growing economy.

[HCWS470]

### **Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council**

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** On 26 February 2015, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles) and the then Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan), having considered the report of the inspection by Dame Louise Casey CB and advice note from Sir Michael Wilshaw (HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills), concluded that it was both necessary and expedient for them to exercise their intervention powers as Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council was failing to comply with its best value duty. Due to the extent and the gravity of the failings in the Council, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government decided that the intervention should be broad and wide ranging. He directed that Commissioners should exercise all executive functions of the authority, as well as some non-executive ones, including licensing, until the Council could exercise them in compliance with its best value duty. A team of Commissioners was appointed to exercise these functions.

On 11 February 2016, my predecessor returned certain functions to the Council, including education, housing and planning. He was satisfied with the progress made and that the Council was able to exercise the identified

functions in compliance with the best value duty. Returning these functions was the start of building effective and accountable political leadership and represented a clear milestone on the road to recovery. On 13 December 2016, I announced the return of licensing functions to the Council. I am pleased now to be able to report on further progress made.

In his 10 November 2016 progress report, Lead Commissioner Sir Derek Myers provided robust evidence to support his recommendation for economic growth, town centres, external partnerships and grounds maintenance to be returned to the Council. Additional information provided in December 2016 gave me sufficient assurance on the return of audit, and adult social care and NHS partnership.

The Commissioners will continue to have oversight of these six service areas to ensure continued compliance with the best value duty. With the exception of adult social care and NHS partnership, where Commissioners will have the power of direction, the other five service areas will be returned to the Council with the Commissioners having the power of advice.

Today, I have written to the Council to say that I am now 'minded to' return these service areas to the Council but will seek representations before making a final decision. I am placing a copy of the documents associated with these announcements in the Library of the House and on my Department's website.

[HCWS475]

## **CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**

### **Sporting Future: Annual Report**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** I am today publishing the first annual report on the Government's sport strategy "Sporting Future: a New Strategy for an Active Nation".

Sporting Future set out a new Government vision to redefine what success looks like in sport by concentrating on five key outcomes—physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. It was a bold new strategy for an active nation. It marked the biggest shift in Government policy on sport for more than a decade. Much has been achieved so far, and this first annual report sets out the steps we have taken towards making sure absolutely everyone can benefit from the power of sport.

Investment in sport and physical activity is now focused on the five key outcomes. Funding is being opened up to organisations who can demonstrate how they will consistently deliver some or all of those shared goals.

Progress has been made against the three major outputs described in Sporting Future—engagement in sport as a participant, volunteer and spectator; maximising international and domestic sporting success and the impact of major events; and supporting a more productive, sustainable and responsible sport sector across the board.

I am grateful to all those who are working to make Sporting Future such a success. The annual report is being deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-first-annual-report>.

[HCWS472]

## DEFENCE

### Service Museums

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning):** My noble Friend the Minister of State in the House of Lords, Earl Howe, has made the following written statement:

Further to my written ministerial statement of 15 October 2015 (HLWS241), I am today announcing the publication of the findings of the review of the three service museums: The National Museum of the Royal Navy, the National Army Museum and the RAF Museum. Periodic reviews of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are part of the Government's commitment to ensuring, and improving, the accountability and effectiveness of public bodies.

The review concluded that the service museums support the heritage objectives of the Ministry of Defence and the functions performed are still required. The review recommended that the service museums should be retained as NDPBs of the Ministry of Defence.

The review was carried out with the participation of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders and I am grateful to all those who contributed to this review.

The Review of the Service Museums report has been placed in the Library of the House. It will also be available on the Government website at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS473]

## EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

### General Affairs Council: February 2017

**The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones):** The General Affairs Council (GAC) was held on 7 February in Brussels under the Maltese presidency.

The agenda covered follow up to the December European Council; preparation for the March European Council; and Commission communication on next steps for a sustainable European future. The UK permanent representative to the EU represented the UK.

A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2017/02/07/>.

*Follow up to the December European Council*

The Maltese presidency presented the EU's key priorities and progress, stating that further work was needed in all areas. The Commission added that member states should not lose sight of making progress on relocation and the common European asylum system.

*Preparation for the March European Council*

The presidency presented the draft agenda which includes: jobs, growth and competitiveness, which would take stock of single market strategies; security, where leaders would examine decisions taken at December's European Council; and a place-holder for external relations. The presidency announced that external migration would be added. The UK supported the addition of migration following the discussions at the Valletta summit, welcomed the opportunity to return to security and noted the importance of jobs, growth and competitiveness and external relations.

*Commission communication on next steps for a sustainable European future*

The Commission introduced its communication, in which it set out a vision for a more sustainable future in line with the UN sustainable development goals and Agenda 2030. It includes empowerment of women; energy transformation; a digital single market; and lifelong learning. There will be Council conclusions in June to progress work in this area.

*AOB*

Portugal presented conclusions of a conference on the future of the European monetary union held in Lisbon in January. The conference, attended primarily by representatives from southern European countries, called for the EU to work together to promote growth and convergence across eurozone countries, backed by a socially sustainable increase in public and private investment.

[HCWS477]

## TRANSPORT

### Commercial Spaceflight

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):**

We intend to publish a draft spaceflight Bill later this month, dedicated to commercial spaceflight in the UK. This legislation will be fundamental to enabling small satellite launches and sub-orbital flights from the UK, ensuring the UK is well placed to take advantage of a growing global market. The Government's intention is to introduce this Bill formally early in the next Session, following a period of scrutiny and engagement with industry and other interest groups.

The space sector is vital to the future of the UK economy, with a strong record of creating high-value jobs and generating wealth across the country. To help the creation of the space launch market in the UK, the UK Space Agency is inviting commercial space consortia to apply for grant funding to take the action that will make our ambitions a reality.

Together, the proposed legislation and grant funding announced today will have the potential to enable commercial spaceflight from a UK spaceport by 2020.

[HCWS471]

### Ministerial Cars

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) has made the following written statement.

I am publishing today details of the charges incurred by Departments for the use of official Government cars provided to Ministers by the Government Car Service during the financial year 2015-16, which are in the attached table.

Official transport is provided so that Ministers can carry out their work effectively and securely, including working on sensitive and confidential Government documents while travelling.

We are committed to continuing our focus on reducing the cost to the taxpayer of the provision of secure ministerial cars. The Government Car Service has reduced its running costs by three quarters since 2010. We continue to be committed to reducing the cost to the taxpayer of the provision of secure transport.



To assist public scrutiny, equivalent figures for the £6.7 million charges to each Department under the last Labour Government can be found at 28 October 2010, *Official Report*, column 23WS.

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansard/cm101028/wmstext/101028m0001.htm#10102827000372>.

| Department                                                    | No. of GCS departmental pool car services at (31/3/16) | Departmental pool car services | Pre-booked service | Total charges (all services) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Attorney General's Office (formerly Law Officer's Department) | 1                                                      | £82,221.67                     | £0.00              | £82,221.67                   |
| Cabinet Office                                                | 3                                                      | £181,486.50                    | £6,172.25          | £187,658.75                  |
| Government Chief Whip                                         | 0                                                      | £25,435.49                     | £3,076.25          | £28,511.74                   |
| Leader of the House of Commons                                | 1                                                      | £73,233.74                     | £0.00              | £73,233.74                   |
| Department for Business, Innovation and Skills                | 1                                                      | £84,797.79                     | £4,512.45          | £89,310.24                   |
| Department for Education                                      | 1                                                      | £87,837.30                     | £24,899.33         | £112,736.63                  |
| Department for Communities and Local Government               | 2                                                      | £172,334.20                    | £2,260.35          | £174,594.55                  |
| Department for Culture, Media and Sport                       | 1                                                      | £82,449.30                     | £292.50            | £82,741.80                   |
| Department for Energy and Climate Change                      | 1                                                      | £83,199.54                     | £1,907.25          | £85,106.79                   |
| Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs            | 1                                                      | £94,646.45                     | £9,689.11          | £104,335.56                  |
| Department for International Development                      | 1                                                      | £22,172.98                     | £6,052.50          | £28,225.48                   |
| Department for Transport                                      | 2                                                      | £171,639.84                    | £4,472.05          | £176,111.89                  |
| Department for Work and Pensions                              | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £0.00              | £0.00                        |
| Department of Health                                          | 1                                                      | £84,353.29                     | £75.00             | £84,428.29                   |
| Foreign and Commonwealth Office                               | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £705.00            | £705.00                      |
| HM Treasury                                                   | 2                                                      | £202,226.95                    | £37,397.27         | £239,624.22                  |
| Home Office                                                   | 2                                                      | £171,392.96                    | £27,703.94         | £199,096.90                  |
| Ministry of Defence                                           | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £0.00              | £0.00                        |
| Ministry of Justice                                           | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £1,555.00          | £1,555.00                    |
| Northern Ireland Office                                       | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £11,736.03         | £11,736.03                   |
| Scotland Office                                               | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £593.70            | £593.70                      |
| Wales Office                                                  | 0                                                      | £0.00                          | £3,342.76          | £3,342.76                    |
|                                                               | 20                                                     | £1,619,427.99                  | £146,442.74        | £1,765,870.73                |

**Methodological note:**

The charges recorded in this statement reflect the service model which came into effect in April 2012 as part of the reform programme. This provides departmental pool cars which are a shared resource for a Department to use as efficiently as possible. In addition, the car service offers a small pre-bookable service utilising any spare capacity.

These charges do not necessarily reflect the total spend on car services as some Departments have arrangements with other providers. The Treasury has two Cabinet Ministers. The former Chancellor used the Government Car Service to supply a driver and vehicle for his protection package whereas the PM, Home, Foreign, Defence and Northern Ireland Secretaries of State used the Metropolitan Police. Such charges are not included in the table.

[HCWS478]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Fraud, Error and Debt Measures

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** We are committed to ensuring an effective and accurate benefit system, as part of creating a welfare system which is fair to those who use it, and fair to the taxpayers who fund it. An important part of this is recovering money owed to the Government through overpayment of benefits.

Fraud and error in the DWP benefits system is historically low, and at 1.9% is lower than in 2010. Claimant error and official error are at their lowest level ever, and we are protecting taxpayers' money by recovering a record amount in overpaid benefits. For 2015-16 around £1 billion was recovered jointly by the Department and local authorities, an increase of £70 million since 2014-15.

#### *Using DWP powers to recover tax credits debt*

In order to build on this success, today, I can announce that from April 2018 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will recover a segment of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) tax credits debt associated with people whose tax credits claim has ended. This is debt that has been subject to recovery by HMRC but where repayment has not been secured.

The claimants who have these historic debts will have previously been contacted numerous times by HMRC and invited to start a voluntary repayment plan. They will also have had the opportunity to appeal and challenge the debt.

From April 2018 DWP will begin to try to recover this debt using a wider range of methods. Where people have not voluntarily made arrangements to repay, this may, as a last resort include recovery directly from earnings. DWP has greater powers than HMRC in this regard.

This initiative helps deliver the Government's commitment to reform the benefits system and switch to universal credit. During transition HMRC will continue to administer financial support for those with ongoing entitlement to tax credits.

#### *Using data and analytics to identify potential fraud and error*

Many people rely on the benefit system for support—it provides a vital safety net for people who are out of work, people with disabilities, those who are carers, bringing up children, retired, or on low incomes. So it is vital that we protect it from the very small minority who try to claim taxpayers' money they are not entitled to.

According to the most recent fraud and error national statistics around £110 million is lost annually to DWP as a result of fraud and error relating to undeclared partners. The most up to date information (financial year 13-14) suggests around 1.5% of income support (IS) expenditure is overpaid annually as a result of a partner not being declared appropriately.

We will engage with an external data provider to identify benefit claimants thought to be most likely to have an undeclared partner more effectively. We expect that this will provide more and better evidence to enable us to identify high risk cases. The data provider will not have any contact with claimants directly or any decision making authority. All cases will be progressed through the existing DWP fraud and compliance processes.

We expect to award a contract for around 18 months and will evaluate its effectiveness in order to inform decisions about whether this type of data matching

provides a useful indication of undeclared partners for future use in the universal credit system.

[HCWS474]





# ORAL ANSWERS

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