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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 16 October 2017

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Neighbourhood Policing

1. **Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential connection between crime levels and changes in the level of neighbourhood policing. [901136]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Crime as measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales has continued to fall in recent years. That includes the period after 2010, when police forces played their part in tackling the deficit by operating within reduced budgets. Decisions on deployment are rightly made by chief constables, working with their democratically accountable police and crime commissioners to meet local needs.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary was so excited that she neglected to mention that she was seeking to group question 1 with question 4—which is, of course, entirely orderly.

Amber Rudd: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

4. **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential connection between crime levels and changes in the level of neighbourhood policing. [901139]

Stephanie Peacock: A quarter of my local police forces' operational strength has been cut since 2010. When I visited police in Barnsley this weekend, they told me that they were genuinely worried about how they would continue to operate at the same level if further cuts were made. Does the Home Secretary disagree with officers such as those in Barnsley who say that additional cuts will have a severe impact on neighbourhood policing?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Lady that there are no plans for further cuts, and that the police budget has been protected between 2015 and 2020. I have particular admiration for South Yorkshire police, who recently launched a new neighbourhood policing model

that is moving significant resources in neighbourhood policing across the forces' four districts. That shows exactly how well they are operating.

Holly Lynch: As the Home Secretary will know, one of the crimes that has increased is the carrying out of attacks on police officers themselves. May I therefore take this opportunity to welcome today's news that the Government will support the "protect the protectors" Bill, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), on Friday?

That having been said, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary recently warned that

"the position on crime prevention and local policing continues to deteriorate."

Does the Minister now accept that neighbourhood policing is at the very core of crime prevention, and that it is neighbourhood policing that has had to bear the lion's share of the loss of 20,000 police officers across the country, much to the detriment of safety in our communities?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady has raised two points. On the first, I agree with her. I welcome the close working to protect the protectors, and we will continue to do that. As for the specific point about the hon. Lady's local police force, it is good to see that West Yorkshire police is graded as "good" across all three strands, and that HM Inspector of Constabulary Mike Cunningham has said:

"I am very pleased with the overall performance of West Yorkshire Police."

May that continue.

Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): If the Government are going to support the private Member's Bill mentioned by the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), it is important that the Ministry of Justice and the Crown Prosecution Service play their part as well, and that, when the Sentencing Council suggests that judges give more severe sentences for assaults on police officers and other emergency workers, they do what it says on the tin.

Amber Rudd: Let me first congratulate my right hon. Friend, and secondly say how much I agree with him. That will not be a surprise, in view of his record in the Chamber on these issues. I will indeed convey his request to the CPS, and ensure that we deliver that.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): There is a worrying increase in crime in West Yorkshire, including in my constituency, and it is a fact that the police officers, who are doing a fantastic job, are overstretched. The Government's first duty should be to protect the public and keep them safe. May I urge the Home Secretary to ensure that more resources go into West Yorkshire to support the police who are tackling that worrying rise in crime?

Amber Rudd: I agree with my hon. Friend that the first role of Governments is indeed to protect people; as the Conservative party in government, we will make sure that we do that at every step. I can tell my hon. Friend that the total cash funding for West Yorkshire in

2017-18 has increased by £3.7 million since 2015-16, and also that West Yorkshire has police resource reserves of £91 million.

Mr Speaker: I understand that the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead is to become a knight of the realm. I had not been aware of that important fact, but I am now, and I warmly congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, who is evidently absolutely delighted with the status to be conferred upon him.

On the matter of knights, I call Sir Edward Davey.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Given that the Met police are issuing guidelines that some so-called low-level crime will no longer be investigated in London, is it not now crystal clear that Government cuts in community policing are helping criminals and hurting victims? Will the Home Secretary now tell the House that she is campaigning in the Government for a big rise in police funding in the forthcoming Budget?

Amber Rudd: Let me respectfully observe to the right hon. Gentleman that, having spoken to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner very recently, I know that there is no change in the operating model of the Metropolitan police. They will continue to triage crimes as they arrive in the appropriate way, to ensure that they always prioritise the most important. Conservative Members will always be on the side of the victims, and will always ensure that the police have the right resources to address crime.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Northamptonshire has 1,242 police officers, 488 specials, 860 police staff and 95 police community support officers. Will the Home Secretary congratulate Northamptonshire police on starting a drive to recruit even more police officers this year?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and will of course join him in congratulating Northamptonshire police. I should add that his force is not the only one increasing recruitment and the number of crimes it is solving. Sometimes, listening to Opposition Members, one could think that the police were not doing the fantastic duty that they are; I urge Opposition Members to take the time sometimes to congratulate them on the phenomenal job they do.

Residency Rights (EU Nationals)

2. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What her policy is on the residency rights of EU nationals (a) during any transitional phase and (b) after the UK leaves the EU. [901137]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): The Prime Minister was clear in her Florence speech in September that people will continue to be able to come to, and live and work in, the UK. There will be a registration system—an essential preparation for the new immigration system required to retake control of our borders—and we will be setting out initial proposals for the implementation period in due course, and for our new immigration system later in the year.

Hannah Bardell: I have encountered numerous cases where documents supplied to the Home Office by EU nationals have been misplaced or permanently lost. Does the Minister think it is fair or reasonable to expect people to endure the financial cost of replacing these documents for the Home Office? What assurances can he give that this issue will be addressed, especially given the chaos that is about to ensue as we leave the EU?

Brandon Lewis: We are clear that we want to work with our partners in Europe to have a smooth and good system for EU citizens here to go through as they gain settled status as part of the fair and very serious proposal we made, and I am confident that we will be able to deliver that in a simple and clean system for them. Obviously, if the hon. Lady has particular cases that she feels we need to look at, I encourage her to write to me and I will happily look at them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah, another knight popping up—or perhaps I should say “languidly rising.” I call Sir Edward Leigh.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): There has been a lot of reportage and worry in this country about the number of EU nationals coming here perfectly legally. I am much more worried about what the Home Affairs Committee was told last week by David Wood, former head of immigration: there are 1 million illegals here, which the Home Office knows nothing about. Will the Minister’s Department focus on fast-tracking our friends and relations who are here legally from the EU so it can concentrate on the illegals?

Brandon Lewis: We are very much focused on dealing with people who are here illegally; that is what the compliant environment work is all about. Obviously our friends and partners and citizens from the EU are, under free movement, here entirely legally. I encourage them to remain, as we value what they do for our society and economy, and we will remain focused on dealing with the illegal immigrants, who should be in their home countries.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Scottish Government have said that they will meet the fee for settled status applications of EU citizens working in the public sector in Scotland, in order to keep vital workers in the NHS and other public services and to make it clear that we want them to stay because we welcome them. Will the United Kingdom Government match that promise—or, better still, waive the fee entirely?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate the comment that the hon. and learned Lady has made, and will certainly feed that through. Obviously, we are in negotiations at the moment; when they end, we will know exactly what the system will be.

Joanna Cherry: Scotland does not want to lose the benefit of freedom of movement. Yesterday the Unison trade union said that immigration must be devolved to Scotland after Brexit or else there would be a population crisis. In saying that, Unison is joining with business in Scotland, including the Chambers of Commerce and

the Institute of Directors, who have said that they want a separate deal for immigration in Scotland. With this wide support from civic society for the devolution of at least some immigration to Scotland, what will it take for the Minister's Department to give these calls the serious consideration that they deserve?

Brandon Lewis: We have commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee, who are going to be looking at the impact of European workers on our economies. We are clear that we value their input both in society to our communities and to our economy. We want EU citizens to stay and will be encouraging them to do so, as the Prime Minister and Home Secretary have done on numerous occasions.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that we cannot move on to trade talks with EU negotiators until we have resolved the questions of the Irish border, the financial settlement and EU citizens' rights. When will Ministers accept that the Government's current proposals on EU citizens' rights post-Brexit fall short because, among other things, EU citizens will not have the same right to bring in family members that they currently enjoy?

Brandon Lewis: Negotiations are progressing well. We are clear that, as our offer outlines, when we leave the European Union we will ensure that European citizens in this country have the same rights as British citizens. I am just disappointed that the right hon. Lady is not as focused on the rights of British citizens, both here and abroad.

Refugee Family Reunions

3. **Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD):** Whether her Department is taking steps to broaden the criteria under which refugee family reunions are permitted. [901138]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): The family reunion policy allows immediate family members of those granted protection in the UK to reunite with them here. In addition, the family provisions in the immigration rules also provide for relatives with protection in the UK to sponsor children when there are serious and compelling circumstances. Our policy is clear: where an application fails under the rules, we consider whether there are exceptional reasons to grant leave outside the rules.

Layla Moran: As the Minister will be aware, a lone child refugee is currently unable to sponsor even their parents or siblings to join them in safety here. UNICEF and the Refugee Council have both said that the rules are too restrictive, and the Home Affairs Committee has called the situation "perverse". Will the Government therefore support the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill, introduced in the other place by my colleague Baroness Hamwee, and allow these vulnerable children a chance to have the loving upbringing that every child surely deserves?

Brandon Lewis: We are working with the UNHCR and with UNICEF on this issue, and we want to ensure that the application of these rules and this policy works in practice. I ask the hon. Lady to look again at the

rules that I have outlined, because we can consider whether there are exceptional reasons to grant leave outside the rules.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Minister will know that it is around 12 months since the Calais jungle was cleared, and Britain did its bit through the Dublin and the Dubs schemes to take some unaccompanied child and teenage refugees. Will he confirm, however, that since then no further child or teenage refugees have come to this country under the Dubs scheme and, in particular, that there have been none from Italy or Greece? Will he accept that the Home Office has designed the scheme in a way that is too restrictive and that makes it too difficult for Italy and Greece to send children here, despite the fact that there are still 280 pledged local authority places that remain unfilled? Will he now agree to revise the scheme to ensure that those 280 places can be filled before Christmas?

Brandon Lewis: We are working with other countries, which have their own national sovereignty. I was in Italy and Greece over the summer to talk about these programmes, and we are working with the Greek and French authorities to ensure that more children can come over and that we fulfil our duty. Let us bear in mind that when we get to the 480, the United Kingdom will have done more than other European countries, and we should be proud of that.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Will the Minister also look at the distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children? About a quarter of the total are in Kent, but you won't find many in the metropolitan borough of Wakefield.

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. His county council in Kent is doing some fantastic work, and there are councils around the country making offers to do similar work. It would be good to see more councils coming forward to do that work, and I will be speaking to the Local Government Association this week about that very issue.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): My private Member's Bill, the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill, will have its Second Reading on 16 March. It is important for families to be united, especially when they need to travel together. I have a 14-year-old constituent who was born and raised in the Hebrides. Unfortunately, her father has died and her mother has not been seen for about 12 years, as I am sure the Home Office knows. Crucially, the mother's birth certificate cannot be found. The upshot is that the UK Government refuse to give my constituent a passport. She needs a status letter, please. It is beyond any doubt that this girl is a Hebridean Scot. In the words of the Home Office,

"On the balance of probabilities, the girl is a British national".

Will the Home Office now give my constituent and her grandparents that status letter, so that she can get her passport? Anything less would create tremendous difficulties, as I am sure the Minister knows.

Brandon Lewis: I am aware of that case and saw the hon. Gentleman's social media output over the weekend, so I will write to him with some details. When we issue passports, we have to ensure that we go through all the

proper checks to make sure that we are doing things correctly. I make no excuses for that—it is obviously a matter of national security. However, I am looking into the case and will get back to him in the next couple of days.

Motorcycle and Moped-enabled Crime

5. **Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to reduce the incidence of moped and motorcycle-enabled crime. [901140]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): We recently brought together—Mr Speaker, I have failed once more. May I group Question 5 with Question 19?

Mr Speaker: That was not requested, but I am, as usual, in a generous and benevolent mood.

19. **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce motorcycle and moped crime. [901155]

Amber Rudd: We recently brought together motorcycle insurance industry leaders, law enforcement partners, the Local Government Association, charities and representatives from the motorcycle-riding community to have a full and open discussion about the issue. All parties agreed to work together to devise a comprehensive action plan to tackle this type of crime. As a first step, we have announced a review of the law, guidance and practice surrounding police pursuits and response driving.

Mr Speaker: Order. I wanted to respond favourably partly for the benefit of the Home Secretary and her illustrious office and partly because the temptation to hear the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) is overwhelming.

Neil Coyle: Of 20,000 moped-related crimes in London last year, 752 happened in Southwark, but only 17 people were charged with an offence. Instead of tackling the rising problem, the Government have announced a review. What are the terms of this pathetic response to this blight on my constituents' lives? When will it be completed? What specific additional resources and powers will it give our overstretched and underfunded police?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we do not have operational control over what goes on in his constituency; what we do have is the ability to pull people together to get the right answers. This sort of evolving crime needs to be dealt with by bringing people together to find out the best way to address it. We need to be guided by the police and local authorities. I urge him to engage with that consultation so that we get the right answers for his constituents.

Robert Neill: In the course of the Home Secretary's welcome review, will she undertake to get the message out that pretty cynical and street-hardened young people, such as some in my constituency, are taking off their helmets when the police appear on the scene because they believe that the police will not chase them under the current guidelines? The guidelines are utterly out of

touch with reality and frustrate police officers who are trying to do their job. Will the review look at that specific issue?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point in his particularly distinct way. He is absolutely right—he has put his finger on it—that the police do have a concern and we are having the review to address that concern. I hope that I will be able to come back to him with some progress soon.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Over the past six months, 35 motor vehicle thefts and a rise in moped-related crime have been reported in Penge. Yesterday, it was reported that an acid attack occurred in broad daylight. Many of my constituents are becoming increasingly concerned. What exactly is the Department doing to combat such crimes?

Amber Rudd: I share the hon. Lady's concerns. We take this matter seriously and we must address it, particularly because such crimes tend to evolve and can hold a fashionable attraction for different communities. That is why we are having this review. That is why we are bringing together the different parties, and I urge her to engage with the process.

Asset Recovery Programme

6. **Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): What steps she is taking to confiscate money from criminals; and how she plans further to strengthen the asset recovery programme. [901141]

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): Since 2010, we have recovered £1.4 billion under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. The Criminal Finances Act 2017 provides important new powers to improve the asset recovery system, such as unexplained wealth orders and the forfeiture of bank accounts. The Government are also implementing the recommendations of a 2016 Public Accounts Committee report, and our asset recovery action plan will be published by the end of the calendar year.

Victoria Atkins: Serious criminals view prison as an occupational hazard, but they do not like it when law enforcement hits them in the wallet and goes after their illegally obtained assets. Will my right hon. Friend assure me and the House that the National Crime Agency will use the exciting new powers, including unexplained wealth orders, that it has been given?

Mr Wallace: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are determined that unexplained wealth orders should be used not only by the NCA but by broader law enforcement to ensure that people have to prove where they got their wealth. Using that reverse burden of proof makes sure that we progress to taking an asset if a criminal's wealth is unexplained and might have resulted from criminality.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister aware that we regard the National Crime Agency as a bunch of amateurs in this field? People are increasingly talking about a big Russian mafia presence

in London that is spending huge fortunes on organising crime. When will he take those people seriously and do something about them?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know—it might make him a bit happier—that that is why unexplained wealth orders, when applied to people outside the European economic area, have a lower burden of proof in court, so that we can freeze their assets and ensure that such people prove where they got their billions. We can then take the money and redistribute it back to the people who need it, either the law enforcement agencies or back to the countries from which they might have stolen it.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Can the Minister assure me that we will retain the European arrest warrant, retain co-operation with other European police forces and use all the powers we have in Europe, as well as in the United Kingdom, to bring such assets to justice?

Mr Wallace: I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is exactly our goal to keep all those measures, but there is another party on the other side of the negotiating table. We would like to keep those measures, and we will ask for that—perhaps he could ask them, too—and let us hope they give it to us.

Police Funding

7. **Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of police funding. [901142]

9. **Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of police funding. [901144]

14. **Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of police funding. [901150]

17. **Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of police funding. [901153]

23. **Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op):** What assessment she has made of the adequacy of the 2015 funding settlement for police authorities. [901159]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): Mr Speaker, I may be testing your legendary benevolence to the limit by seeking to group Question 7 with Questions 9, 14, 17 and 23.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has slipped in Question 23, which was not part of the original request. That should not be the normal practice, but on this occasion, notwithstanding a certain amount of twitching by the learned souls who advise me, I am inclined to try to be helpful.

Mr Hurd: I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker. The twitches are noted for future occasions.

In 2017, the taxpayer will invest more than £11 billion in our police system, an increase of more than £114 million on 2015. However, we recognise that demand on the

police is changing, and we are very sensitive to the pressure they are under. That is why we are reviewing demand and resilience, and we will consult on plans for the 2018-19 settlement before the end of the year.

Mary Glendon: With direct resource funding amounting to a budget cut due to inflation and with the chief constable stating that the force is getting very near to not being able to deliver a professional service, how can the Minister guarantee to keep people across Northumbria safe?

Mr Hurd: I had a productive meeting with the chief constable and Commissioner Baird, and I have a good understanding of some of the policing challenges they face and of the historic ratio of precept funding to core grant funding. All I will say is that, as with every single force, we are reviewing the demands on Northumbria police and its resilience before we make decisions on the 2018-19 funding settlement, on which we will consult before the end of the year.

Paula Sherriff: The chief constable of West Yorkshire police said, “Our officers are exhausted” and that policing is “not sustainable” in the long term without an uplift in funding. We have lost more than 1,000 officers in West Yorkshire, yet this weekend Ministers briefed the press that there is room for more cuts. If the Government’s first duty is the safety of their citizens, how can they possibly justify more cuts in the face of such warnings?

Mr Hurd: We are not cutting. As I have made clear, the amount of taxpayers’ money going into the police system has gone up and individual police budgets are flat. The amount of funding for West Yorkshire police rose in 2015-16 by £3.7 million, and the force is sitting on £91 million of reserves, some 22% of revenue.

Julie Cooper: Since January 2017, policing the anti-fracking protest in Lancashire has cost Lancashire constabulary close to £4 million. Given that 78% of the protestors are not from Lancashire, when will the Government step in to meet those costs? It cannot be right for the council tax payers of Lancashire to bear the burden of what is essentially a national protest.

Mr Hurd: I understand the hon. Lady’s point. I am sure she is aware that we have a special grant pot, from which police forces can bid to cover significant, unexpected costs. A number of forces, including Lancashire, have put in bids to cover the costs of fracking protests. That is under review.

Helen Hayes: Last month, my constituent Jude Gayle, a young father, was stabbed to death as he returned home—yet another tragic and senseless loss in a growing number of knife attacks, which are up 20% in London over the past year. Will the Home Secretary finally accept that cutting hundreds of millions of pounds from the Metropolitan police budget since 2010 is a reckless approach to the safety and security of Londoners?

Mr Hurd: We have not, and I do not necessarily think there is any link between a reduction in police numbers and the outcome in terms of the complex drivers of the crime that the hon. Lady mentioned. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member

for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) is totally on top of this in terms of new legislation to ban the sale of zombie knives, for example. What I say, as a London MP, is that the budget for the Met is under review, as is that of every other force in the country, ahead of the 2018-19 funding settlement.

Tracy Brabin: “With officer numbers at 1985 levels, crime up 10% in the last year and police work becoming ever more complex, this additional pressure is not sustainable.

The current flat cash settlement for forces announced in 2015 is no longer enough.”

Those were the words of Britain’s most senior police chief. Which part of that does the Minister disagree with?

Mr Hurd: The hon. Lady will know, because her shadow Minister put it on the record last time, that police budgets have been protected in the round—that is the reality—but we recognise that demand on the police is changing. I echo the Home Secretary’s words: we are absolutely determined to make sure that the police have the resources they need to do the job properly, while continuing to support and challenge them to be more efficient and effective.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Wiltshire police force’s investigation into the pretty flimsy allegations against Sir Edward Heath—a matter to which I hope to return in topical questions, if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr Speaker—has cost between £1.5 million and £2 million, depending on whom one listens to. Most of us think that is an idiotic waste of money. I am grateful to the Home Office for agreeing to pay £1.1 million of that, thereby relieving my constituents in terms of their council tax obligations, but if this is a national matter, why is the Home Office paying only £1.1 million and not the whole thing?

Mr Hurd: I understand the strength of feeling from my hon. Friend on this matter. I can assure him that applications for grants and support for this inquiry went through all the normal processes, with the appropriate checks and balances on this.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Essex’s police service is doing an amazing job, but it is the second lowest funded in the country and our local policing precept is also very low. Will the Minister join me in congratulating Essex police on the job they do? Will he also be prepared to meet Essex MPs to discuss the possibility of increasing the local funding contribution, without the cost of a referendum?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend for that, and I join her in celebrating the success of Essex police. I have received representations from the Essex police and crime commissioner—now also the fire commissioner—and other commissioners about flexibility on precept funding, and that is all part of the analysis we are doing as we look to the settlement for next year. Of course, I would be delighted to meet Essex Members of Parliament.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): Antisocial behaviour and so-called low-level crime are a blight on Mansfield’s town centre, limiting investment and regeneration.

Opposition Members are always keen to talk about budgets, which we know have risen, but it is not enough to throw money at a problem without having a plan. Will the Minister therefore tell me what proposals might come forward to try new methods of policing issues such as antisocial behaviour?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I understand that antisocial behaviour, particularly in town centres, is a blight, not least on the economy. I think three things need to happen: the Government need to make sure local police forces have the resources they need; the local commissioner and the chief have to make sure they have a smart system for allocating resources to demand and local priorities; and the police have to be very smart in how they work in partnership with local agencies and local businesses to work together to confront those issues, which is exactly what I saw recently in Newcastle.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The Minister will be aware of proposals to merge Devon and Cornwall police with the Dorset police force. Will he reassure me that if that merger goes ahead, there will be no loss in funding and the funding for the new combined force will be at least equal to that which the two separate forces currently enjoy?

Mr Hurd: I understand the point my hon. Friend is making on behalf of Cornwall. I have received representations on this potential merger, but there is no question of our imposing it; it has come out of the system and we will look at it, carefully examining the business case and indications of support from both parts involved in any merger, particularly Cornwall.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The policing of shale gas protests in Kirby Misperton in my constituency is putting pressure on local budgets, but many of the protestors are connected to national campaigns. Will the Minister agree to a meeting with me and the police and crime commissioner, so that we can make our case on why the costs should be met with national funds rather than by local taxpayers?

Mr Hurd: The short answer is yes.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): We know the pressures on police resources from a rise in violent crime, a huge increase in 999 and 101 calls, an unprecedented terrorist threat and a surge in non-crime demand because of mental health issues and missing persons. The police simply do not have the resources to respond to every report of crime. Were the Minister’s house burgled, how would he feel if the police did not show up?

Mr Hurd: I would feel frustrated and angry, as anyone else would. Government Members totally recognise the pressure that the police are under; in fact, I am currently concluding a process of speaking to or visiting every single police force in England and Wales, so I do not need any lectures on how pressured and stretched the police system is. We are listening and that is feeding into the work we are doing ahead of the consultation on the 2018-19 funding settlement. We are determined to make

sure that the police have the resources they need to do the job, while we also continue to challenge them to be efficient and effective.

International Students

8. **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): What her policy is on the number of international students who are admitted to the UK. [901143]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): The Government are working hard to continue to attract international students to study here in the UK. There is no limit on the number of genuine international students that educational institutions in the UK can recruit; nor do we intend to change that position.

Chris Law: I have the honour of representing in my constituency two universities, Abertay University and University of Dundee, with a large intake of international students. Does the Minister agree that the Government's confused approach to international students, based on information, will damage Scotland's reputation as a world-leading destination for study?

Brandon Lewis: The short answer is no. The hon. Gentleman might be a bit confused, because we have been clear all the way through that we want good, genuine international students here at good, genuine institutions. The Government should take great credit for shutting down bogus colleges, so that when students come here they know that they are going to a good, strong institution. They play an important part in our economy, and we encourage that to continue.

24. [901160] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): When international students come to the UK, what fees are they charged, and does the Department make a profit? The charge in a case of indefinite leave to remain is £2,297, but the cost to the Home Office is just £252. What kind of a racket is being run at the Home Office?

Brandon Lewis: I am happy to remind the hon. Gentleman that we set immigration and nationality fees at a level that ensures that the income received contributes towards the resources that are necessary for the wider border, immigration and nationality system, and in line with the charging powers approved by Parliament that are set out in the Immigration Act 2014, which he may have forgotten.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): What response have the Government given to the Government of India, who have made it clear that any post-Brexit trade deal is conditional on greatly expanding the number of student and other visas?

Brandon Lewis: Obviously, as I said in answer to the first question from the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), we continue to encourage international students to come here. It is good to see that universities in this country saw a 5% rise last year. That is good for the economy, good for universities and good for our society.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Minister knows that international students are different from other types of migrants. They are temporary; they make a vital economic and cultural contribution to our universities; they contribute billions

of pounds to our economy; and public opinion correctly does not think of students as immigrants. When will Ministers listen to voices from all parts of the House and remove international students from the immigration total?

Brandon Lewis: I say gently to the right hon. Lady that the definition of net migration, which is decided by the UN, refers to people who have been in the country for 12 months or more, which university students obviously have if they are here for three years and using services here. Ultimately, though, the numbers are decided by the Office for National Statistics, which is an entirely independent organisation, and not by the Government.

Border Facilities

10. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What contingency (a) funding and (b) planning her Department has for new customs check-points and other border facilities in the event that negotiations with the EU do not result in a deal. [901145]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): We are confident that a positive deal can be reached, but we are of course preparing for every outcome. Although we cannot comment on the detailed planning, Departments are working together across a range of complex issues to develop our future approach to the border, including for a possible no-deal scenario. Those options will be subject to the outcome of our negotiations with our partners in the EU.

Mr Bradshaw: The Minister's former immigration director, David Wood, said last week that, with current resources, the challenge of Brexit "can't be met", and that is with a minimum two-year transition, let alone the chaos of a no-deal scenario. Given all the other demands on his budget that we have heard about today, is it not grossly irresponsible for some of his Cabinet colleagues to be running around talking up the prospects of a no deal, instead of being level with the public about any trade-offs that will inevitably result in a Brexit deal?

Brandon Lewis: I am optimistic that we will get a good deal both for the UK and for our partners in Europe, so that we can work together as forward-looking partners, but we are also actively monitoring work flows at the border to ensure that we have sufficient resources in place to meet demand. As my colleagues across the Government and in the Cabinet have said, it is absolutely right that we do plan for all eventualities.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Minister is, as always, a happy and optimistic chap, but, obviously, we must plan for a no-deal situation. The only thing that disturbed me was that the Government seem to want it kept in secret. Would it not be nice if it was shared with the whole House, so that British business and other people would know what a no-deal situation looked like?

Brandon Lewis: I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments about my demeanour, and I will always try to remain optimistic and happy about the fact that we are focused on ensuring that we keep our borders secure and that we are ready for any outcome at the end of the negotiations.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Can the Minister confirm that, lying outside the Schengen area as we do, we already practically and financially support the borders of the Irish Republic and that there are no plans for that to change?

Brandon Lewis: I can confirm that. As the Prime Minister has outlined, we are very determined to ensure that we continue with the common travel area as is in place across the country and with Ireland.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Watching the faces on the Front Bench, we see the sensible wing of the Conservative party too frightened, rightly, to say what a no-deal Brexit would look like. May I urge the Minister to talk to the “fun boy three”—the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the Secretary of State for International Trade—and leave them in no doubt about the strength of feeling among Opposition Members of the need properly to prepare for all eventualities and to plan for a deal with our European colleagues?

Brandon Lewis: I am absolutely astonished that the hon. Lady has asked that question, bearing in mind that, over the weekend, it became clear that the Labour party is prepared to take a bad deal, or any deal, as opposed to a good deal. As the Prime Minister has outlined, it is absolutely right that we are optimistic and trying to achieve a deal that works for both the United Kingdom and our partners in Europe, but, at the same time, we must also do the job that we have been brought here to do, which is to prepare for all eventualities.

Mr Speaker: I am rather surprised that the hon. Lady remembers Fun Boy Three, as they came into great prominence long before her time.

Knife Crime

11. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce knife crime. [901146]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): We all recognise the importance of dealing with knife crime, given the terrible impact that it can have on people’s minds. Our work to tackle it is centred on working on four key strands: on police and enforcement; on retailers and responsible sales; on the legislative framework; and on early intervention.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply. Does she agree that, one of the challenges here is that some of the most lethal knives are actually in people’s kitchens up and down the land, which makes them very difficult to regulate. On sentencing criminals, will she tell the House how many people have been convicted under the so-called Nick de Bois amendment of “two strikes and you’re out”?

Amber Rudd: I share my hon. Friend’s concerns. That was exactly the right amendment and we need to ensure that it is enforced. I have also taken up the matter further with Nick de Bois, a former Member here, to see how we can implement it. He also drew attention to the importance of our £500,000 community fund, which enables local organisations to work with the community

on early intervention to stop people picking up knives in the first place. That is available now, and I urge Members on both sides of the House to consider inviting local community organisations to apply for the fund.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Today was the first evidence session for the Youth Violence Commission, and we looked specifically at the role of youth and community work. Does the Secretary of State agree that early intervention is important in tackling knife crime and what would she say to those calling for a statutory youth service that is fully funded?

Amber Rudd: I certainly agree that early intervention is critical. My conversations with chief constables and colleges led to that. We need to do more to ensure that young people realise the consequence of carrying knives, as well as the terrible impact it can have on them if they are seen to be carrying one. That is why we have introduced the community fund, for which I urge the hon. Lady and other hon. Members to consider applying.

Study Visas

12. **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): What proportion of international students in the UK have been found to have overstayed their study visa. [901148]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): Exit check analysis shows that 97% of students whose visas expired in 2016-17 were recorded as having left in time. That is good evidence that our reforms, from 2010 onwards, to tackle abuse in the education sector have worked.

Jo Stevens: If or, as seems likely, when Britain crashes out of the EU with no deal, what will happen at the point of exit to international students here on the Erasmus+ programme, many of whom are in my constituency of Cardiff Central?

Brandon Lewis: As I said earlier, there is no limit on the number of students. I am not going to predict the outcome post our negotiations but, as I have said to other colleagues, we are working to get a good deal for the United Kingdom and our partners in Europe.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Applications for international students and other immigration applications cost hundreds of pounds, and errors are common. When the Home Office makes such errors, it puts constituents and citizens in unnecessary distress, but there are no consequences for the Department getting critical decisions wrong time and again. Will the Minister explain where the profits from visa and other visa-related applications are going and how much of the fees received pay for these services? What will he do to improve such a terrible service?

Mr Speaker: That was an extremely scholarly academic inquiry to which an extremely pithy response is required—not beyond the competence of a graduate of the University of Buckingham in my constituency, I feel sure.

Brandon Lewis: I will do my best to rise to the challenge, Mr Speaker. As I said earlier, the immigration system’s visas and charges are as per the Immigration Act 2014. I would challenge the hon. Member for Manchester,

Gorton (Afzal Khan) a little bit because no one has come to me about mistakes in how we deal with student visas. We are encouraging students from all over the world to come here.

Online Radicalisation

13. **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): What steps she is taking to safeguard vulnerable people from online radicalisation. [901149]

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): The Government have been clear that there should be no safe space online for terrorists and their supporters to radicalise, recruit, incite or inspire. We are working closely with the industry, including through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, to encourage it to develop innovative solutions to tackle online radicalisation.

Wendy Morton: Does the Minister agree that some of the world's leading internet companies could do more to ensure that the propaganda emanating from Daesh and others is taken down immediately and not allowed to poison not just vulnerable individuals, but young minds?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is right. Internet companies could do more with their technology. They could do much more to recognise that they have a responsibility for much of the stuff that is hosted on their sites and they could do more to take it down. That is why the United Kingdom Government, through the Global Internet Forum, are taking the lead in dealing with the issue. The Home Secretary was only recently in Silicon Valley, talking to those companies and trying to put further pressure on them to use their profits and vast wealth actually to do something about it.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): As part of the Government's strategy for online safety, they are seeking to ensure that all those suppliers bidding for information-sensitive contracts are certificated under their Cyber Essentials scheme. Yet the Government have admitted to me in a written answer that they do not even bother to count the number of suppliers signed up to that scheme. In those circumstances, how can the Government ever look at and consider the success of their policy?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. The authority placing the contract will, of course, verify the conditions of the contract before signing it. Whether we put it together and say, "We've got 1,000", is slightly the second point. The main issue is whether it is properly done. On top of that, the UK Government as a whole invest £1.9 billion into the national cyber-security strategy to ensure that we deal with threats against our companies and individuals.

Rural Crime

15. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle rural crime. [901151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): The Government have ensured that, through the election of police and crime commissioners, communities—including those in

rural areas—have a strong voice in determining how police resources are allocated, to tackle the crimes that most matter to them. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in congratulating Katy Bourne on her work to prioritise rural crime in Sussex.

Huw Merriman: I certainly congratulate Katy Bourne, who does a great job. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to ensure that the police investigate all crimes and not give a perception that certain offences, particularly those prevalent in rural areas, will not be pursued?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Of course, police will investigate all crimes. Extremely good police and crime commissioners who work with their communities, such as Katy Bourne, are able to prioritise what matters most to people. They often work in partnership with great organisations such as the National Farmers Union to come up with the right solutions for the community.

UK Visas and Immigration

16. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the performance of UK Visas and Immigration. [901152]

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): The Home Office deals with millions of visa, citizenship, passport and immigration status applications each year. In the past year, UKVI has received more than 3.5 million applications, and more than 98.5% of major application routes, including for non-settlement, EU applications and asylum, have all been decided within their service standards. Some 99% of straightforward non-settlement applications were processed within 15 days last year.

Daniel Zeichner: I have a number of constituents who have family members who have applied for visas, submitted their passports and then endured very long delays—in some cases of many months—without their passports, so in effect they are trapped, unable to travel. What is UKVI going to do about those cases?

Brandon Lewis: Reviewing identity documents such as passports as part of an application is obviously an important part of maintaining a robust immigration system. Travel documents are retained for the duration of the decision-making process, but if the applicant wishes to travel while the application is being considered, dependent on the route through which they have applied, we will of course return their passport to them. If the applicant needs a passport for ID purposes, we can send certified copies that they are able to use.

Topical Questions

T1. [901101] **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): I wish to update the House briefly on the Government's decision to launch a consultation on new laws on corrosive substances, knives and guns. All forms of violent crime are completely unacceptable and devastate lives, families and communities. That is why I have launched a consultation on offensive and dangerous weapons,

with proposals to ban the sale of the most harmful corrosive substances to under-18s, and to introduce minimum prison sentences for those who repeatedly carry corrosives without good reason. The consultation also includes new measures to prevent under-18s from getting around age restrictions by buying knives online, and proposals to ban offensive weapons such as zombie knives from being kept privately.

I want to send a powerful message that the cowards who burn with acid or cut with knives will not escape the full force of the law. I am clear that, by threatening someone with a knife or by plotting an acid attack, the only life you will be ruining is your own.

John Mann: Zombies are running wild in our communities. Sometimes those zombies are naked, their minds addled by a psychoactive street substance called Mamba. When will this House have a vote on making the possession of Mamba illegal?

Amber Rudd: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about Mamba and the growth of other elements of drugs. That is why we have introduced a new drugs strategy, to try to help people exit. It involves making sure that local authorities work closely with police, housing and other stakeholder support areas. It is not just about banning, which is important, but about helping people to get off it and to get out and start to live their lives without it.

T4. [901104] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): We have already heard this afternoon that mopeds are being increasingly used in daring and violent crimes by criminals who know they will not be pursued because police officers face prosecution if an accident occurs. Will the Home Secretary support the Police Federation's call for a change in the law so that the police are free to chase criminals using mopeds?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for her question on such an important area. It is vital that the police have the confidence and the allowance to pursue people when they need to do so. That is why we are conducting a review to give them extra clarity that they can pursue people on mopeds.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I have been touring the country speaking to fire chiefs, and we have spoken about the consequences of the Government's austerity obsession, which, since 2010, has led to 11,000 firefighters being axed, reduced home fire safety checks, increased response times, and, in some areas, fire-related deaths increasing. Does the Secretary of State support calls from some fire chiefs for pre-set flexibility to keep our citizens safe? If not, does she support increased funding for this crucial service?

Amber Rudd: We must congratulate the people in the fire authorities, who have made sure that the amount of fires has fallen by 50% and the number of deaths from fires has reduced by 20%. They have done incredibly well at, in effect, driving productivity in that way. I will make sure that they are always suitably funded. One of the ways in which they can have more funds is by making efficiencies by merging with police forces. I am delighted that a number of fire authorities are doing exactly that. The proposals are with us at the moment. Fire authorities will be able to make efficiencies and spend more money on the frontline.

T6. [901106] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): After lengthy conversations with the district commander of my local district of Tendring and with Roger Hirst, the police and crime commissioner for Essex, I know that there is a strong feeling that they could do with some additional funding to fund their frontline officers. This could be raised from the council tax precept. Essex currently has a very low per capita precept, meaning that residents in Essex pay less than comparable areas. Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary consider lifting the 2% cap on any precept increase without the need for a referendum?

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). I will be delighted to sit down with Essex MPs to discuss this. As I said, a number of commissioners have approached us in similar vein, and it is part of our thinking as we look ahead towards the 2018-19 settlement.

T2. [901102] **Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I am sure the Home Secretary will agree that tools such as the European arrest warrant, the European Criminal Records Information System—ECRIS—and SIS II, the second generation Schengen Information System, are all vital in keeping British people safe. Given that these key EU crime-fighting co-ordination mechanisms are all overseen by the European Court of Justice, how precisely does she intend to keep Britain within them and keep the Prime Minister's promised red line against the ECJ?

Amber Rudd: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the principle of having continued access to these databases is important for making sure that we keep people safe—people in the UK and people in the EU. As regards what sort of jurisdiction there is with oversight on the final arrangement, we are hoping to have a treaty to engage with them. I point him to other arrangements that are already in place. There are different arrangements with Norway, Switzerland, America, and Europol. We will have a creative and, I hope, positive approach to delivering on that.

T9. [901109] **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): While I am optimistic that the Government's negotiation will in due course produce a wide-ranging deal with the EU, in the event of no deal, what thought has the Home Secretary given to ensuring the free flow of people, where desired, across borders, but also controlling them for the purposes of security?

The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis): My hon. Friend makes a good point. As I outlined earlier, we are preparing for all eventualities. We have published our offer for EU citizens. We will publish a White Paper later this year outlining our views about a future immigration system. We have also been very clear, in terms of citizens and flow, that we do not want to have a cliff edge. We want to make sure that businesses and the economy across this country can continue to access the labour they need as we move to a new immigration system.

T3. [901103] **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, a church in my constituency, was recently exposed by the *Liverpool Echo* as overseeing what can only be described as disturbing

and dangerous gay cure therapies, which involve rituals and starvation as a cure for homosexuality. What assessment has the Minister made of such therapies in relation to LGBT hate crime? Will she take forward previous efforts to have an outright ban on such therapies, which have no place in 21st-century Britain?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. It is very sad to hear what is happening in his constituency. I would welcome him coming to the Home Office and providing me with more detail. One would really hope that in the 21st century such homophobic activity was consigned to the history books. Let me be absolutely clear: there is no place in our society for hate crime. In our hate crime action plan, we have very, very strong laws against those committing homophobic hate crime. I hope that his constituents will not hesitate to use those powers.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Following a spate of vehicle thefts in my constituency, would my right hon. Friend take action to ban the online sale of devices that are helping criminals to steal high-value vehicles by bypassing security coding and reprogramming onboard computer systems?

Mr Hurd: Vehicle theft is a horrible crime. It is at historic lows, but we are seeing spikes in some areas and we know that the methods used by criminals are constantly evolving. I can reassure my hon. Friend that we are not complacent at all and we are working very closely with industry to make sure we stay ahead of the criminals.

T5. [901105] **Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** A recent High Court ruling found that asylum seekers who had suffered torture had been detained unlawfully. Can the Secretary of State please provide to the House the date on which those individuals who were wrongfully detained will be freed?

Brandon Lewis: I am happy to write to the hon. Lady. We are going through the judgment from the High Court, which did outline that the policy, in itself, is potentially okay. I am happy to come back to her with some details on that in due course.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Nottinghamshire police force has decided, without any consultation and with hardly any notice—literally, a note under the clerk's door—to end community policing in Kimberley and Nuthall in my constituency. I do not expect the Minister to comment on the merits of the decision, but does he agree that in community policing, it is really important to work with and communicate with communities?

Mr Hurd: I could not agree with my right hon. Friend more. It is not for me to comment on the individual decision. Nottinghamshire police force does a good job and it has difficult decisions to take, but when it takes such decisions, it must make sure that it takes the community with it, particularly on an issue as sensitive as community policing.

T7. [901107] **Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** What is the point of visa priority services if they do not actually provide any kind of priority? Will the Home Secretary reply to the letter I sent her in August containing several examples of constituents paying

through the nose for priority tier 2 or settlement visas but waiting far longer than the promised 10 to 15 days for any kind of response?

Brandon Lewis: We do have a priority system, and I outlined earlier the high levels of success we have in dealing with applications in the timeframes set out in our service level agreements. Obviously, some cases have complexities to them, which means that they will take longer, and we let individual applicants know that.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): The Crown Prosecution Service report on violence against women and girls, which was published last week, demonstrated that real progress has been made in encouraging victims to report their crimes, and in improving the number of perpetrators who are prosecuted and convicted. But we know that many survivors do not involve the police. Women's Aid found that only half of women in refuges report crimes against them, and only one in five women had seen a criminal case or sanctions against a perpetrator. Can my hon. Friend assure me that the welcome new domestic violence and abuse Bill will not only focus on the criminal justice system but deliver the progress that survivors need across all areas of Government, including housing, health and support for their children?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is right to point out the significant progress that the Government have made on tackling domestic violence and the support that we are giving to victims. We are not at all complacent, however, and we have a groundbreaking opportunity with the forthcoming legislation to make the prevention of domestic violence and abuse everyone's business. I am working with vigour and at speed with colleagues across Government to make sure that we have, as my hon. Friend quite rightly points out we should, a joined-up approach that includes housing, welfare and employment.

T8. [901108] **Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab):** Does the Home Secretary share my concern that the Intelligence and Security Committee has not met since April?

Amber Rudd: I want to reassure the hon. Gentleman that we have plenty of bilateral meetings that cover some of the elements that he has raised. We will be having a meeting of the National Security Committee soon, and when that takes place I will be able to reassure him.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Farmers in my constituency have recently encountered Travellers coming illegally on to their land. Does the Secretary of State believe that the police should be given more powers to deal with this issue?

Mr Hurd: That is a question that the House feels very strongly about, as evidenced by the number of colleagues on both sides of the House who took part in the recent debate. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Government are consulting on exactly that point.

T10. [901110] **Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab):** This month, Amnesty International accused the Government of breaching international law on account of the increasing number of asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children in particular, being deported to Afghanistan.

Last year was the deadliest year on record for civilians there; this year, over 5,000 people have already been killed. Will the Minister commit to changing current Home Office guidance, which states that returning young people to Kabul is considered “reasonable”?

Brandon Lewis: We obviously keep all routes of return under review at all times to ensure that when we return people, on the basis of the evidence in the cases before us, we are doing the right thing for those people as well as for the United Kingdom. We will continue to do that, with the best interests of those individuals at heart.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): The Minister is currently considering an application to bring together fire and policing functions in Northamptonshire, and I commend that to him in the strongest possible terms. What benefit does he see that sort of amalgamation bringing to the delivery of emergency services on the ground?

Mr Hurd: I see a major benefit in increased accountability and transparency for the people of Northamptonshire. There may also be significant financial benefits just from the efficiencies that such services can find together. I find from going around the country and talking to forces, in areas such as Northamptonshire that are doing great work on collaboration, that there is so much potential. I think we are at the start of this journey, rather than at the end of it.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Last week, all parties backed a near unanimous motion on Ealing Council to introduce a public spaces protection order outside the Marie Stopes family planning clinic there, because three decades of protests by pro-lifers and one year of protests by pro-choicers have made it impossible for residents to pass along the pavement and have obstructed women having legal NHS healthcare. Will the Government issue guidance on whether other local authorities with such facilities within their boundaries should follow suit, or will there be a more national permanent solution?

Mr Speaker: I am indulgence itself, but give colleagues an inch and they take a mile.

Amber Rudd: I commend the hon. Lady for raising this subject. It is imperative that women have access to safe and legal abortion. Although we of course agree that public protest must be allowed, it must not in any way be allowed to intimidate women on the way to receiving the health services they want. I am watching with interest how Ealing Council, which is the first to do this, manages, and we will see whether any additional support is needed. It is a local matter, but as I say, I am very interested to see the outcome of this and I welcome her raising it in the House.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): In response to what can at best be described as a fishing expedition by Wiltshire police on the steps of Sir Edward Heath’s house in Salisbury some years ago, some 118 people came forward with allegations against Sir Edward. Of them, 111 have since been dismissed, leaving a handful that are still theoretically on the table. The Home Secretary has now had an opportunity to read both volumes of the report produced by the police and released last week,

one of which is of course secret. Will she advise the House whether there is one shred of evidence in either report that Sir Edward Heath was a paedophile, or one scintilla of doubt about that?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. I have seen the reports, and I can confirm that the report clearly states that “no inference of guilt” should be drawn from its contents.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that, with fire deaths in Cheshire having increased every year for the past four years, cuts to fire services and, indeed, the downgrading of appliances cannot continue without severe consequences for local people?

Mr Hurd: According to my information, Cheshire fire and rescue service has had a 31% reduction in fires over the past five years, and a 6% reduction in incidents. This year, it had a core spending power of £40.9 million, and at March 2017, it held reserves of £28 million.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Home Secretary confirm that the new emigration procedure post-Brexit will be introduced in this House before the end of this year, and will she also confirm that it will not discriminate against non-EU citizens?

Amber Rudd: We will bring forward a White Paper on emigration by the end of this year, an emigration Bill will be brought forward at the beginning of next year and the Migration Advisory Committee will complete its report by the end of next year. It will be a very busy 12 months.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): With Daesh potentially on the verge of collapse, is the country experiencing an increase in the number of British jihadists attempting to return secretly, and will any of them be formally allowed back in?

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): There is no evidence that that has happened. Of course, people think that it probably will happen, but at the moment the figures do not match the theory. When anyone returns about whom we have a suspicion that they have been fighting for any group or committed a crime overseas, they can expect to be arrested and questioned by the appropriate police forces. If there is evidence, we will obviously prosecute them for their crimes.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Another day, another awful story of a family split apart by the Government’s draconian family visa rules, this time the Newton family. When will the Home Secretary scrap the ludicrous income threshold and the other unwarranted requirements for spouse and partner visas?

Brandon Lewis: There are no plans to change the current situation whereby people need to be able to show that they can support those they bring into the country. People have to go through a full process, and that is absolutely right to ensure that we have a strong and clear immigration system.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be aware that last week's revelations about Cyril Smith in the child abuse inquiry demonstrate that the cover-up of decades of child abuse reached the highest levels of Government. Will she commit to releasing papers held by all Departments and agencies in relation to the case so that Cyril Smith's many victims, who were denied justice in his lifetime, can now find it in theirs?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Lady that, where appropriate, those papers are being released. Some papers are held for national security reasons, and she would not want me to persuade the security services to release those. However, I am encouraged to hear her positive approach to the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse for perhaps the first time.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): In the Newtown area of my constituency there have been seven shootings in the past three months. Local people tell me that they simply do not feel safe, and cuts to police funding and neighbourhood policing are having a devastating impact. Why cannot the Home Secretary see that she is failing in her responsibility to resource the services that are required to keep us safe? How much more will my constituents have to suffer before she changes course?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady makes the valid point that a number of shooting crimes are being committed at the moment. That is why the Government have increased funding to police and specialist policing by £32 million for armed uplift to ensure that we have

trained officers on the ground to deal with such threats, and that when we go after criminals who are armed, the police are protected and have the right equipment to do the job and make sure that those people are put in prison.

Mr Speaker: Last but not never least, Mr Chris Bryant.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Emergency workers are there to protect all of us, so an attack on an emergency worker is an attack on us all. Surely the law should therefore come down heavily on any assailant. Will the Home Secretary confirm for the avoidance of doubt that the Government will support my private Member's Bill on Friday? Will she ensure that magistrates understand that, when they say that police officers and other emergency workers should have to put up with a certain amount of violence in their jobs, that is completely untrue? We should protect the protectors.

Mr Hurd: The hon. Gentleman will know, certainly if he listened to the Home Secretary's conference speech, that the Government are extremely supportive of the spirit of his Bill and included such measures in our manifesto. Any drama around the Government's accepting the principle of his Bill is therefore of his manufacturing, as he well knows from our conversations. We want to support the Bill because we want to send the strongest possible signal that assaulting emergency workers is intolerable and anyone who does that should feel the full weight of the law. As with all private Members' Bills, there will be detail to work through, but he knows that we support the principle of his Bill, on which we congratulate him.

Iran

3.44 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the joint comprehensive plan of action with Iran.

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. The Government take note of President Trump's decision not to recertify the joint comprehensive plan of action and are concerned by the implications. The Government are strongly committed to the deal. The JCPOA contributes to the United Kingdom's wider non-proliferation objectives. The International Atomic Energy Agency continues to report Iran's compliance with its nuclear commitments. We share serious concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and its destabilising activity in the region.

Emily Thornberry: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. While I am, as always, grateful for the Minister's presence and his opening remarks, I must say that it is a matter of deep regret that the Foreign Secretary did not consider this worthy of his attention today. For a man who so desperately wants to run the country, he shows surprisingly little interest in running his own Department.

The nuclear deal with Iran stands out as one of the most successful diplomatic achievements of the last decade, and let us be clear: the deal is working. What could today have been another North Korea-type crisis in the heart of the middle east has instead been one problem that the region does not have to worry about. For Donald Trump to jeopardise that deal—for him to move the goalposts by linking it to important but utterly extraneous issues around Iran's wider activities in the region; for him to play these games—is reckless, mindless and downright dangerous. It makes a reality of Hillary Clinton's prophecy that putting Donald Trump in the White House will create a real and present danger to world peace.

Let us make it clear that when Donald Trump talks about the deal needing to be fixed, that is utterly disingenuous, when the only evidence that it is in any way broken is a figment of his fevered brain. Yet sadly this behaviour is what we have come to expect of this President. Some of us in the House have been sounding these warnings from day one of his presidency, whether over climate change, human rights or the Iran nuclear deal. When we raised those fears in the House, what did the Foreign Secretary say? He said that I was being "too pessimistic". He told us that his strategy of hugging the President close—inviting him to meet the Queen, holding his hand when needs be—was the way to wield influence. Specifically on the Iran deal, the Foreign Secretary stood at the Dispatch Box seven months ago and said that I had simply got it wrong on the Iran deal. He said:

"We were told that the...plan of action on Iran, was going to be junked",

but

"it is now pretty clear that America supports it."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2017; Vol. 624, c. 116.]

Well, one of us got it wrong. One of us was being naive and complacent, and one of us is seven months too late in waking up to this issue.

It really is high time that we had a Government capable of standing up to Donald Trump, not just meekly following his lead. Perhaps in his response the Minister can make a start by making clear two specific differences between this country's policies and Donald Trump's. Will he make it clear today that the Government will reject any attempt to make the deal subject to new conditions that have nothing to do with Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons? Will he also make it clear that we reject an approach whereby international agreements can be made by one President and torn up by the next for purely political reasons? It puts us in the invidious position that we will never ever feel secure doing a deal with America again. Will he share that concern today and reassure our allies that this is one Trump lead that the British Government will never follow?

Alistair Burt: I am answering a question about the future of the joint comprehensive plan of action with Iran, and I think I will focus more on Iran and the British Government's position than anything else, because that is what I am required to do.

I thank the right hon. Lady in the first place for making it clear that she agrees with the Government's assessment of the importance of the joint comprehensive plan of action and our belief that the deal is working. I can tell the House that this was a hard-won deal. It went through many years of negotiation. It was not designed as an all-embracing deal to cover everything that concerned the west and Iran, and both Iran and those who have signed the deal have made that clear. There are a number of issues on all sides, certainly involving ballistic missiles and also Iran's activities in the region. As Foreign Minister Zarif made clear, however, at a meeting of the UN at which the Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was present—as was I, representing the Government, and other signatories—if the deal is to be renegotiated, there is an awful lot on both sides to be renegotiated that was never contemplated by any party when we signed the deal. The deal was designed to do a specific job, which was to curtail Iran's nuclear programme and its pursuit of a nuclear weapon, and so far it has done just that. That is why the UK strongly supports it.

Clearly we disagree with President Trump's assessment. We do not fail to understand the United States' concerns about Iran's activities in the region, and we have made that clear, but we also believe that those matters need to be dealt with outside the agreement, which is why the agreement is so important. To have gone through all that and got something that works, in a world where it is quite difficult to get agreements that work, and then to put it to one side would not help the wider situation. We will continue to work our counsel with the United States and other parties to the agreement, and we will continue to work with the Iranian Government on matters of mutual interest, including those things about which we have concerns, to see if we can use the agreement as a possible springboard to future confidence, knowing that these things do not come quickly, but knowing also that signatures on deals matter. That is what the UK will adhere to.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Given the President's astonishingly bovine decision—even by his standards—to decertify the joint comprehensive plan of action, against the best military and intelligence advice available to him, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that although we acknowledge, as he did, the very

considerable difficulties in dealing with Iran outside this agreement, it is through diplomacy that we have the greatest possible chance to achieve change and progress? Will he therefore assure the House further that there is no question of Her Majesty's Government supporting the President's view?

Alistair Burt: I can assure my right hon. Friend, whose expertise and long experience in these matters speak volumes, that what I said earlier about our disagreement with the President's assessment of the current state of the deal holds true. The implementation of the Iran nuclear deal marked a major step forward in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon's capability. It immediately extended Iran's break-out time, meaning it would take it 12 months to get enough fissile material for a weapon, and has offered an opportunity for Iranians to make positive decisions about their country's future and its role in the region. We also recognise that the deal must be policed properly for it to remain a good deal. I say again that elements of Iran's conduct in the region cause concern in many states—we know that—but, as he said, these matters must be pursued through the bilateral relationship we are working on, together with other states that continue to engage with Iran seriously about its responsibilities in the region.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): The deal shows what can be achieved through diplomacy and dialogue, and I pay tribute to those in Europe and elsewhere, including those in the Minister's Department, who worked so hard to make it a reality. Has the Minister been clear about his disagreement with the Trump Administration, and can he reveal to the House what his discussions have been? Also, to what extent will he continue to work with our European partners—our natural partners, not the enemy—on this issue?

Alistair Burt: I can assure the House and the hon. Gentleman that discussions with allies go on all the time, and obviously, in the run-up to consideration of the United States' position on Iran, there was consultation not only with the UK but with all the parties to the agreement, and those discussions will continue. The agreement remains in place, of course; the President has put elements of it to Congress for certification, but the US did not take the opportunity to scrap it completely. That gives us the opportunity to continue moving forward. Conversations about the agreement, which was signed by many parties, not just the US and Iran, will continue between allies.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): May I associate myself absolutely with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who made an excellent point? Has the Minister spoken to some of the other signatories—I am thinking particularly of France and Germany—to hear their view of the matter, and has he spoken to the Iranian Government to assure them, should they feel that a response should be made that would breach the agreement, that it would have consequences, and it would be very much in their interests to respect the agreement despite the actions of the White House?

Alistair Burt: At the recent United Nations General Assembly, the High Representative of the European Union called a meeting of all the signatories who were

available. As I said a moment ago, I represented the Foreign Secretary, who was attending a Cabinet meeting in the UK. There was a discussion about our respective positions. This was a known meeting, not a private meeting, so I can disclose the situation. It was an opportunity for all the parties—knowing that the United States was considering its position very carefully—to say what they thought about the deal, and all of them except the United States professed that they believed it was working and that they intended to continue it.

This was the first meeting between Secretary of State Tillerson and Foreign Minister Zarif, and it gave the two of them an opportunity to have an exchange about their respective positions. I have to say that it was one of the most enlightening conversations that I listened to. I thought that both of them were perfectly honest in relation to their concerns about their positions. The Secretary of State explained, as did the President in his statement, some of the background to the United States' concerns, which Foreign Minister Zarif met.

The conclusion is that this was an agreement based not on trust but on distrust. That is why it was so painstaking, that is why it is so important, and that is why it needs to be adhered to. Making an agreement in these circumstances means that we must be very sure about commitments for the future, or about pulling away from them, if we are to build on that with the rest of the mistrust in the region.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): As the right hon. Gentleman can already tell, the Government's strong support for the deal is widely shared on both sides of the House. Does he agree, however, that among the consequences of President Trump's announcement are, first, that it will undermine confidence in international agreements of this sort—and, as we have already heard, this agreement was painfully and painstakingly negotiated by many people including Baroness Ashton—and, secondly, that it will enable the less than moderate forces in Iran to say to the more moderate forces, "We told you that you could not trust the United States of America", which is not in anyone's interests?

Alistair Burt: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with great experience. Of course there is a risk that an agreement signed by one Administration and not followed through by another in its full terms will lead to exactly the consequences that he has described. In defence of its position, the United States has made it clear that the President was elected having said what he had said about the agreement, which had not been ratified by Congress, and he stands by that.

I think that we should focus less on what was said last week by one party to the agreement than on what is being said by all the other parties to it: that is, we recognise its importance, and we recognise the need to adhere to an agreement if it is working and is certified on all sides. It is the United Kingdom's view, and that of all the other signatories bar the United States, that the International Atomic Energy Agency has certified that Iran is living up to its obligations under the deal, and that that is the basis on which we should work. Certainly, if we want to encourage others to sign deals that may not benefit all elements of a regime, adhering to a deal is extremely important.

[*Alistair Burt*]

The right hon. Gentleman is right to recognise that there are different voices to be listened to and different voices that speak in Tehran, and it is essential for us to be cognisant of that before we take any particular action.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): When Sir Peter Westmacott was British ambassador in Washington, he held 47 one-to-one meetings with United States senators to persuade the United States Congress not to damage the agreement. Will the Minister assure the House that British diplomats are redoubling their efforts in Washington to ensure that Congress continues not to damage the agreement, and will he consider recalling to the colours some of our talented and expert people who may have thought that they were enjoying a well-deserved retirement?

Alistair Burt: On the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, one of the most enjoyable parts of my role is to have access not only to current ambassadors but to those I have known and who have served the country in exemplary fashion, as has Peter Westmacott, and to be able to draw on their experience. I can therefore assure my hon. Friend that that experience is not lost.

Congress now has the opportunity to expedite legislation on Iran, and we understand it will discuss the issue in the coming weeks. We will continue to work with all our partners in the nuclear deal, including the US, to ensure that all parties implement it in full, and I can assure the House that our diplomatic service in Washington will indeed be working with all elements of the House, as we have done throughout all the terms of the deal.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The Minister has described how difficult and complex it was to negotiate this deal, which was such a significant step forward, and is, of course, now at risk. May I urge him to be a little bolder and state clearly on the record whether he thinks this intervention from the US President will make it easier or more difficult to reach successful multilateral diplomatic agreements in future?

Alistair Burt: That is a good question. Honesty in these matters is very important, and if we know anything about President Trump and his Administration it is that he did make certain things clear before he was elected, which he has followed through on, and I think that the President and the United States would defend their actions in that way. There is of course a significant risk: agreements do go on, Government to Government, and ensuring that an agreement is adhered to is fundamental to international negotiations. The fact is that the agreement stays in place, and the other signatories are clear about what it means, and have been very clear with the Iranian Government that they believe they are upholding their obligations and that they must continue to do so. Again, let there be no doubt that Iran has occasionally pushed at the boundaries of this agreement, but those matters have been resolved. Provided that all the signatories remain in compliance, it is the view of the United Kingdom and others beyond the United States that the agreement should stay in place. I would hope that that would continue, on further reflection, to be the view of all signatories to the agreement, but that will depend on all parties adhering to the letter of the agreement.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Government dust off the files marked "Cold war containment" and try to get the message across to our American friends and allies that a policy of containment while repressive societies evolve is the best way to deal with countries like Iran?

Alistair Burt: Again, I thank my right hon. Friend, who has long experience of these matters. If there is a colleague in the House associated with the cold war, it might, indeed, be my right hon. Friend, for his considerable knowledge, and, if I may say so, the occasional activity associated with it, which are a subject of his memoirs. His point is right. The world went through an awful time in the cold war, as some of us will remember and others will not. The world teetered on the brink of nuclear disaster, and was only pulled back by sensible decisions and the bravery of people in very difficult circumstances. We feel we have moved forward by trying to get the agreements we need. We know where the threats are in other parts of the world where an agreement has not been possible: there is no JCPOA in the far east, and we worry about the consequences of that.

I repeat what I said earlier about the United Kingdom's position: the fact that this hard-won deal dealt with an aspect of the relationship between Iran and the rest of the world in a manner that could be verified and enabled us to move on, notwithstanding the fact that there were other issues, was really important. If we are not to see a return to cold war, we should look for the opportunity to make that engagement, and be honest in our relationships with each other on things we cannot agree on, but always try to find a way through without isolation and cutting contacts, as that only requires a climb-down at some stage in the future to find a way to re-engage.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does this episode not illustrate the folly of breaking from our natural friends and allies in Europe and throwing in our lot with an unpredictable and irrational American President? That would be the outcome of the extreme hard Brexit that the Minister's boss and the other hard Brexiters on his Benches are pursuing.

Alistair Burt: I might be the wrong Minister to answer all the details of that question. I simply want to make it clear that I get no indication from my friends in the EU who have been connected with this agreement that any distinction is made between our relationship before the referendum and our relationship now or in the future in relation to these matters. We are firm colleagues and we will remain firm colleagues. This matter overrides those considerations, and I am absolutely sure that those strong friendships and the way in which we see the world will remain the same.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I welcome the Government's position. Does the Minister realise that what is important is the regime's direction of travel, and that the moderates have the upper hand in Iran, in large part because of this deal? Will the Government therefore do what they can to encourage Congress not to make the wrong decision during the 60-day window? Otherwise, the implications for the rules-based international system will be obvious, not least to the North Koreans.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is an experienced member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and he well understands some of the dynamics relating to Iran. Iran is a complex

political society with different representatives and different voices, as I said earlier. It is clear that there are elements in Iran who saw the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—JCPOA—as an opportunity to open possibilities for the country on the wider stage, and who recognised that for those possibilities to be maximised, other behaviour had to be recognised and curtailed. There may be others in Iran who saw the agreement in a different light. The United Kingdom's position is to believe that the signing of the agreement brought an opportunity to continue to work with those who wanted to see Iran return to the world stage. It will not be able to do that if it continues with disruptive activity in the regions, but adhering to this agreement has been very important. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to Foreign Minister Zarif twice in the past week—once before the President's announcement and once after it—and I am sure that he made that clear to those elements who wish to see the JCPOA leading to something good for the future of the region.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that President Trump is a proliferator, that he is encouraging the undermining of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and that by his action he will make it almost impossible to get any agreement on North Korea?

Alistair Burt: In all fairness, it is not for me to deal with the intentions of the President in the manner that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I simply reiterate that the United Kingdom disagrees with the rationale behind the President's decision. We understand the importance of the non-proliferation treaty, which has been one of the great successes among international agreements in the past 30 or 40 years, and also therefore the importance of signatures on agreements, where those agreements can be verified. We will continue to work with all our partners, including the United States, to try to ensure that our point of view is one that they recognise and support.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I should like to join the universal welcome for the Government's continuing support for the nuclear deal, which is working. Does the Minister agree that creating economic interdependence with Iran should be a general policy objective to deliver more leverage over future behaviour on non-nuclear-related matters?

Alistair Burt: The relationship between states is often complex, and it is doubly so in relation to Iran. We want to see a bilateral relationship with Iran that is based on our values. Trade is clearly important but it cannot be carried on at the expense of those values. Also, the term "leverage" should be considered carefully. It should always be to the mutual advantage of any states that their relationships with one another are based on peace, security, compatibility of values and the opportunity to go over differences and resolve them without conflict. That is what we will continue to do. There are issues between ourselves and Iran, such as the consular matters that people well understand, and we will continue to press them. We hope that the relationship that we are trying to forge will be based on our values and the needs of the rest of the region, which will require Iran to recognise that some of its activities could and should take a different course.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The Minister's statement is welcome and moves us forward, but he will recall that part of the logic behind the decision to engage with Iran

on the basis of distrust, as he says, was the potential for a nuclear-armed Iran to lead to a nuclear arms race in the middle east. What steps will our Government take to say to our friends in the middle east that it is not in their interest to see the agreement destabilised?

Alistair Burt: Most of our friends and partners in the middle east recognise that the non-proliferation treaty has prevented the acquisition of nuclear weapons, which would have been easy. Many states possess the wealth to equip themselves with nuclear weapons, but they have not done so because they accepted the terms of the treaty and other international agreements. The importance of continuing with the JCPOA is about ensuring that the signatories remain convinced that parties and powers that sign such agreements will abide by them. I have heard no suggestion that the President's decision marks a change in that attitude among neighbouring powers, who realise how destabilising a change in Iran's position on the non-proliferation treaty would be. I have also received no suggestion that Iran's seeking nuclear weapons is likely to be an outcome of what we heard last week.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): If the agreement will not in itself control Iran's financing of terrorist groups, will the Minister say a word about how it is acting as a springboard? That would give people more confidence in the deal.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend goes into other aspects of Iran's activity in the region over which a veil cannot and should not be drawn. I will again make the point that the JCPOA was not meant in any way to draw a line under or cover up Iran's activities. It is not the case that if Iran stuck to this element of the deal, everything else would no longer need to be considered. Other measures are in place to deal with such things. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is covered by EU sanctions, for example, and sanctions are available against those who finance terrorist activity, which would include some in Iran. EU sanctions are already in place in relation to Iranian individuals who have been suspected of human rights abuses, for example. Other leverage is available to deal with our concerns about Iran, and sanctions remain available to us, but we want to use the agreement as an opportunity to deal with the things on which Iran could and should do more. We will continue to do that by developing a bilateral relationship with Iran.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Britain had just restarted diplomatic relations with Iran and a new British ambassador was on his way to Tehran when George W. Bush foolishly included Iran in the "axis of evil" speech, making it much more difficult for us to progress our relations with Iran. Is it not now all the more important to make it absolutely clear that we are a country in our own right and will not necessarily follow the American line, and that we will want to make strong alliances with our allies in Europe in the future, even if we are not a member of the EU?

Alistair Burt: I agree with all the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, and the Foreign Secretary met Vice-President Salehi last week. I reiterate that the importance of the agreement is that it dealt with one aspect of the relationship, but there are other aspects. I do not gloss over our other issues with Iran, which will not be in our bilateral discussions, but at least they can be spoken about and at least there is a pathway forward. There is a chance of

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new relationships if each party to the agreement accepts their obligations, particularly in relation to any potential activities in other states.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): While not ignoring human rights abuses and the abuse of minorities, including Christians—the Minister either has acknowledged or would acknowledge such abuses—does he agree it is important for the international community to continue with dialogue to reach a diplomatic solution, and that this nuclear deal makes the region a safer place?

Alistair Burt: I agree with that assessment. As I mentioned earlier, we have only to look at the situation in another part of the world where no such deal exists and where there is deep concern about the movement of a power towards nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons testing. The deal with Iran covers off that issue in an important state in a region that badly needs stability and needs all states to recognise their responsibilities to each other. Closing doors does not help. It is important that states are firm, clear and honest with each other. Not covering things up but always looking for an opportunity to seek change and development: that should be the product of conversations between states that want to achieve something.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Is it not true that one of the dominant voices in Iran is the Revolutionary Guard, the people who blocked the release of Nazanin Ratcliffe? However much we might worry about President Trump's actions, would we not be mad to rely on the word and behaviour of the Revolutionary Guard for nuclear security, or anything else?

Alistair Burt: It is precisely because we do not need to rely on anyone's word—we can rely on a deal verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and its work to verify the deal's commitments—that we have been able to make progress on reducing the number of centrifuges, reducing the amount of stored uranium, reducing heavy water capacity and reducing Iran's ability to create more. All those things are verifiable. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I have mentioned the important distinction that this agreement is not based on each side trusting the word of the other; it is because of the very fact that words cannot always be trusted that there has to be something concrete and visible, and verified by independent parties, on which to proceed. That is what the deal is about. There are words that cannot be relied on in any international context, which is why agreements, and sticking to agreements, are so important.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Although no one disputes the unsettling nature of the Iranian regime, this deal, which was the culmination of 13 years of negotiation, has stopped Iran building a nuclear weapon. Does the Minister agree that Trump's aggressive stance undermines our collective influence and responsibility in managing global security?

Alistair Burt: Since the deal was signed Iran has given up two thirds of its centrifuges and 95% of its uranium stockpile. Our priority is to work with the deal and make it deliver for our shared security interests. It is

helpful if all the parties to the agreement move at the same speed and in the same way. The United States has declared why it does not currently agree with the deal, and we disagree, and have disagreed publicly, with its rationale. We will continue to engage with Iran for the very reasons that my hon. Friend states—for global security and certainty on agreements between states.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Can the agreement carry on without the United States? What is the practical implication of the US position?

Alistair Burt: I knew at some stage a question would be asked that is beyond my pay grade. I have always taken the view that there are many signatories to this agreement. The United States is considering the possibility of new legislation, but it remains a party to the deal, so the deal stays in place. We do not want to contemplate a situation in which one party unilaterally withdraws, because of the implications for other parties. We will do all in our power to ensure that all parties to the agreement continue to adhere to its provisions, that the deal stays in place and that it forms the basis of further discussions about the matters of disagreement between us so that we can build a new consensus on what is needed in the region.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): The deal has made the world a safer place, but it does not cover all aspects, as my right hon. Friend has said. Some constituents of mine are worried that we are giving too much to Iran and ignoring the sponsorship of terrorism that goes on elsewhere. The deal is vital and only it can be the way a peaceful solution can be moved forward, but will he confirm that Britain still stands with other countries that may be affected by the terrorism sponsored by Iran, such as that of Hezbollah and Hamas?

Alistair Burt: I thank my hon. Friend for his observations and remarks, as he gives me another opportunity to make things clear. If this deal had tried to cover all the aspects of concern between the signatories and Iran, it would never have been signed—it just would not have happened. The whole point of the deal was to find an area between two groups of people who were concerned about each other on which they could agree and on which there could be external verification to mean that that particular issue was dealt with. That was the purpose of the deal. At no stage was it envisaged that everything else of concern would suddenly disappear. As I indicated earlier, we remain concerned about Iran's ballistic missile testing and its activity throughout the region, but conversations go on between ourselves and Iran—and other states—on that and on the financing of terror. We can deal with those other issues in other ways, and sanctions will be applied where this is appropriate—where behaviour has been uncovered which breaks international rules.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Minister has said that the approach should be “firm, clear and honest”. Will he give his reassurance to the House that that is how he and Ministers will treat the ongoing discussions about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe?

Alistair Burt: Yes, I repeat what I said in Westminster Hall last week: we remain concerned for all our dual nationals currently detained in Iran. Conversations about them are going on and we believe that on humanitarian

grounds these cases need to be looked at seriously by the authorities in Iran. We have made our views very clear, very regularly and at the highest levels.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I, too, welcome the Minister's stance on the Iran deal. He has already made reference to it, but can he reiterate his confidence in the ongoing monitoring programme?

Alistair Burt: I can, yes. It is our belief that the IAEA has the access it needs to give the parties to the deal—beyond perhaps the United States—the confidence that the deal is being adhered to. That is our view.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) has just asked the question I was going to ask, but it seems a shame to waste all this standing up and sitting back down again, so may I ask the Minister to expand on whether the UK Government and others are actively preparing for a scenario in which the US formally secedes from this arrangement and yet the basic framework is kept in place?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman illustrates that no question is ever wasted here, and that was a good question. As always, the Government have to prepare for all eventualities. It is our belief that the JCPOA should be adhered to and all parties should stick with it, but of course should there be any change in that, we are always prepared. At the moment, we believe the agreement should stay in place and we have the agreement of many parties on all sides for that view.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Given wider concerns about the Iranian regime's appalling human rights record, particularly on LGBT—lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender—issues and with the persecution of Christians, we can understand why people have some scepticism about accepting its word. Will the Minister reassure me as to just how thorough the monitoring of this deal is, so that everyone can have confidence that we are getting exactly what it intended to deliver?

Alistair Burt: As I said, we know enough about the International Atomic Energy Agency's activity to be confident that the deal is being verified. There are elements of the deal that are confidential between the IAEA and Iran—we do not need to go into that—but we are confident about the verification and the matters that have already delivered certain very visible changes with respect to Iran's nuclear stockpile.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): We welcome the tripartite statement on this issue over the weekend from the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of Germany and the President of France, as well as the Minister's comments today. Does not that statement indicate that the British Government's foreign policy voice is magnified when they work with other EU countries and that it is a mistake to use defence and security co-operation as a bargaining chip in the EU divorce negotiations?

Alistair Burt: I am absolutely certain that the UK's relationship with its partners on the continent, within or without our membership of the EU, will always have foreign defence and security matters firmly at its heart.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): The Minister is right to say that even those who support the deal have grave misgivings about Iran's malign regional attitude. The Iranians themselves boast of dominating four Arab capitals, and they are actively and often violently seeking to undermine important regional allies of this country. What practical steps are being taken, with our allies, to address and counter that threat?

Alistair Burt: We remain concerned by the destabilising activities of revolutionary guards in the region—particularly in Syria, Iraq and Yemen—and the IRGC in its entirety remains subject to EU sanctions. Sanctions are only one tool available to the international community. The UK believes that there are other means of challenging Iran's disruptive regional activity that may be more effective, but we are open to considering other matters where appropriate, working in concert with EU partners.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend's understanding the same as that of the EU High Representative: that no one country has the authority to veto the deal?

Alistair Burt: I think it is, in that we were all signatories to the deal. No one wants to see one party come out of it unilaterally, but if one did and others thought the same, that would undermine the deal. We very much want to keep the provisions of the JCPOA going. It provides a degree of certainty about Iran's nuclear programme, and it does not close off other opportunities to deal with issues.

I must say one further thing: at the meeting in New York, Foreign Minister Zarif made it clear that his state had issues, too. It is not for me to comment on the quality of those issues or anything else, but he indicated that if the agreement was thrown up in the air and there was a renegotiation, Iran wanted to bring many other issues into the conversation. My view was that we should keep the JCPOA and make sure we are open to talking about those different issues; I did not get the impression from Secretary of State Tillerson that he was averse to continuing his conversations with Foreign Minister Zarif. That would give us the opportunity to make progress with the many different voices in Tehran and to move forward with those who foresee a different future for Iran if there are changes in its relationships to its neighbours in the region, to the benefit of all and the security of the rest of the world.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): RAF Coningsby in my constituency is the home of the Typhoon jets that keep the nation's skies safe. I am pleased that some constituents of mine have visited the House today. Will my right hon. Friend please assure the people who play such a vital role in the nation's security that every diplomatic effort is being made so that, please God, they never have to face the consequences of diplomacy failing?

Alistair Burt: I can absolutely confirm what my hon. Friend said, and I am pleased to endorse that. If the House will allow me one indulgence, my father was medical officer at Coningsby many years ago, and he recently paid it a visit: 70 years on, he was able to climb into a Lancaster bomber. The way he and his friends were treated that day made it a wonderful experience for him, as someone who had played his part in the RAF many years ago. We pay tribute to those who are working day and night for our security.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The special and historic relationship we have with the United States puts us in a very good position, if not the best, among all the signatories to the agreement, to make clear to the Administration things that I know my right hon. Friend will find the right diplomatic language for. The old dictum is that we campaign in poetry but govern in prose. Being the leader of the free world requires more skills than being a gameshow host or a contestant on “The X Factor”.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is slightly tempting me to use a type of language and to go down a route that might be more appropriate from the Back Benches than at the Dispatch Box. He makes his point well, but we all understand that the President recognises the responsibility that he bears on behalf of many, and that he will continue to listen to partners in relation to defence and security. We will continue to look at all opportunities to do that, particularly in relation to this agreement.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Is it the availability of intelligence that has prompted the Government of Israel to support the President’s assessment?

Alistair Burt: If it was, we do not comment on intelligence matters anyway. None the less, I will say that there are many different voices in Israel as well on this particular agreement. There is no alternative agreement being put forward. I am not aware of an alternative JCPOA being put forward by any powers, and I remain of the view, as do the UK Government, that this agreement does the job that it is designed to do. It does not close our eyes to other things that need to be dealt with, and Israel has genuine concerns about Iranian activity in the region. Those concerns stand whether or not the agreement goes forward, but they are easier to deal with if we keep this agreement in place.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): In contrast to some Opposition Members, I believe in the special relationship with the US. It is a mutually beneficial and enduring relationship that goes way beyond that between one US President and one UK Prime Minister. Can the Minister assure me that the Government are pulling all the available levers in that relationship at every level to persuade our American friends to retain this deal?

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is right in recognising that the United Kingdom’s relationship with the United States is very deep and that, at many levels, contacts are going on all the time right through Government. He can be absolutely assured that those relationships, led by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe and the Americas, ensure that our voice is heard in the United States at the highest levels.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): May I caution my right hon. Friend about seeing this issue purely through the lens of Donald Trump? There are many good friends of the United Kingdom on Capitol Hill, such as Senator John McCain and Congressman Ryan, who have serious and legitimate concerns about this deal, as indeed do friends in Israel and the Gulf states. May I also ask him to consider the comments of Senator McCain over the weekend, which, I think, suggested that there would be more support on Capitol Hill for continuing the deal were the international community to take forward separate and significant activity against Iran’s state sponsorship of terror?

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes a serious point. I can assure him that the United Kingdom is not considering this matter purely through the eyes of the President, although his statement is of course definitive as a Government position. As I said when I began my remarks, I was able to comment on a discussion that I was part of between Secretary of State Tillerson and Foreign Minister Zarif, in which they gave their view of why they were at odds with each other.

The Secretary of State enunciated very well the sort of concerns that are held by a number of Members of the House of Congress and other people in America and in other states. There is no doubt that the concerns expressed by the President are held by others. However, the point is how to use those doubts and whether those doubts were sufficient to put at risk the JCPOA. It is the United Kingdom’s view that they were not and that those other issues, important as they are, should be handled in a different way, but that the JCPOA should stay in place. We will endeavour to work with our allies in relation to that point of view.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Much as many might wish it to, what the JCPOA proscribes is very tight and does not cover things such as ballistic missiles or human rights. Will the Minister outline why such tight proscription is in fact in our interest and Iran’s? The wider we range on issues such as this, the harder it will be to strike any deal.

Alistair Burt: I said earlier that Foreign Minister Zarif has made it clear to the other parties of the agreement that, had the agreement sought to go wider after the years of fairly torturous negotiations on the nucleophile, it simply would not have been signed. If it had not been signed, Iran would have been continuing to proceed on a path that we all felt might lead to the possibility of a nuclear weapon in the region, with all those implications. It was better to have that agreement signed on those terms and to continue work on the other things than it would have been simply to try to find such an all-embracing deal that it would never have been signed by Iran.

Let me spell out to the House the product of the deal. Iran has shipped more than 12 tonnes of enriched uranium to Russia to eliminate its stock of 20% enriched uranium; removed more than 13,000 centrifuges and associated infrastructure; removed the core of the Arak heavy water reactor; removed all excess heavy water to the Arak reactor to prevent the production of weapons-grade plutonium; allowed greater IAEA access and the use of online monitoring; provisionally implemented the IAEA additional protocol; and agreed a procurement channel for authorised exports of nuclear-rated goods and services to Iran. All that was achieved by the deal. We would hold that—notwithstanding the extraneous matters, which are important and need to be dealt with—the product of the deal, as I have enunciated, has been good for the region, the world and the United Kingdom.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I recognise, understand and respect the cross-party consensus reflected in the vast majority of questions in favour of this agreement, but may I just put the alternative point of view to the Minister? This is not a permanent fix to Iran’s nuclear weapons programme. Limits on that

programme begin to wind down in just eight years' time. In the meantime, Iran is looking to construct an airfield and a naval base in Syria, and is developing plans to send a division of troops to Syria. In 10 years' time, we could face the prospect, with a 12-month breakout period, of Iran's having a bigger military footprint in the region, and still being able to develop a nuclear weapon in no time at all. How does the Minister respond to that?

Alistair Burt: If the deal comes to the end with no further agreement about provisions for the future, Iran would still be subject to the nuclear proliferation treaty as it was before. Those provisions will stay in place. Having agreed this treaty, there is no reason to believe that it will not be possible to continue its terms and, clearly, the parties will want to achieve that.

My hon. Friend quite rightly mentions the other activities of Iran that cause concern in the region, and those concerns are very real. We all know enough about this place and politics to know that if everybody agrees on something, there is often a problem. It is right that we hear alternative voices and it is important to listen to things that might be contrary to what we wish if we are to ensure that what we wish for is what happens in reality. That is what the United Kingdom is very clear-sighted on—its relations with its partners, with the United States and with Iran.

Vauxhall (Redundancies)

4.38 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy if he will make a statement on the announcement by Vauxhall to move staff in Ellesmere Port from two production shifts to one in early 2018, resulting in 400 redundancies in the next few months.

The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Claire Perry): Just over 53 years ago, the first Vauxhall Viva rolled off the production line at Ellesmere Port. Since then, seven generations of Astra have been built at the port. Most recently, the plant secured the contract for the mark 7, primarily based on the productivity and co-operation of the local workforce. That is why it is particularly disappointing to hear that Vauxhall is considering voluntary redundancies of up to 400 staff at the Ellesmere Port plant.

As we said last week, this is a concerning time for families, particularly in the run-up to Christmas. I assure the hon. Gentleman and other right hon. and hon. Members that, once again, the Government are standing by to do all we can to support those affected. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is continuing to speak with the company, the unions and the wider supply chain and the Department for Work and Pensions is standing by to provide advice and support to those affected.

I will address three points. First, I will set out what is actually happening to try to reassure people who may be affected by the announcement today. Secondly, I will give some background to what I understand are the reasons for it happening. Thirdly, I will put the announcement in the broader context of the automotive industry.

Today, I have spoken to the head and deputy head of Cheshire West and Chester Council, the chief executive of the local enterprise partnership, the general secretary of Unite the union and the chief executive of Vauxhall UK. The consensus view is that this is due to a downturn in the sale cycle, particularly that of the Astra model, and the company is working through questions about the plant's overall competitiveness.

I am told that workers at the plant have been informed. The statutory consultation period will now take place and no final decisions will or should be taken until it has been completed. The company is hopeful that reductions can be managed on a voluntary basis, and we will continue to work closely with it on its planning.

I was pleased to hear today from the leader and deputy leader of the local council that a redundancy action support plan, which has been used before, will be put in place and will involve the LEP, the council and the Department for Work and Pensions all working together. Given that many of the people working in the plant travel across the border from Wales to their jobs every day, it is particularly important to note that the Welsh Government have been involved and stand by, ready to support any activities.

Given how many skilled workers may be affected by the announcement, we are particularly keen, as we discussed last week, to ensure that those skills are not lost to the industry. I have asked that the Government's

[Claire Perry]

talent retention scheme be deployed, if appropriate, and both the company and Unite the union have agreed that that would be helpful and will agree to work with us. As I have said, I understand that this is a particularly troubling time and we are all absolutely concerned to minimise worries, particularly in the run-up to Christmas.

As I have said, I am told that this is happening because the C-segment class, in which the Astra vehicles sit, is not selling brilliantly across Europe and, in particular, the sales forecast for that model has not been as desired. Therefore, a decision has been taken to maintain the competitive position of the plant, and that announcement is being made today. The Secretary of State and I have consulted the company extensively on its future plans, both for the plant in Ellesmere Port, particularly given its long and illustrious history, and for the company and its footprint in the UK.

That brings me to my third point about the broader context. As we have seen with many other companies, the technology in the auto sector is pivoting away from the traditional models, towards electric, potentially connected and autonomous vehicles. We are doing all we can to support manufacturers in that shift, and to position the UK as the leading place for those decisions and investments to be taken.

We have already delivered more than £500 million of public and private money through the Advanced Propulsion Centre. We will spend £1.25 billion of Government investment over the next five years to support that. The Faraday challenge is particularly important—we have invited all operators to contribute to it—and will help us ensure that we are the leaders in developing the electric battery technology of the future.

Of course, the auto industry has been an incredible success story. Thanks to the workers in the plants, we now have the highest productivity levels in Europe and sales of cars made in the UK are up 70% since 2009. It is a huge success story and we have generated many exports.

All of us in this House should think really hard about the message we are sending to those looking to invest in this industry in the UK—[*Interruption*—and back the fact that we have highly productive plants and highly skilled workforces. Regardless of the changes that may happen in this sector, this is the place for auto companies to invest in the future. Perhaps Members who want to chunter otherwise should think about the messages we are sending to those investors.

Another important point—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sure there are a lot of important points that could be made, but I gently say to the Minister that she has exceeded her allotted time by two and a half minutes. I think her other important point can either be neatly shoehorned into one of her, I hope, pithy replies, or it can be put in the Library, where in the long winter evenings that lie ahead colleagues will be free to consult the relevant material.

Claire Perry *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Lady has finished for now. We will hear from her again, probably before very long, but what I am trying gently to say to her is that was taking too long. I call Rebecca Pow—[*Interruption.*] Order. It is so long since the start of the ministerial

reply that I had forgotten that we have not yet heard from the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). We shall hear from him first.

Justin Madders: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her response.

This is deeply concerning news for those at the plant and for the automotive sector more widely. It will have a significant impact on the local economy. What action can the Minister take to ensure that there are no compulsory redundancies? As she said, the consensus is that the reason for this decision is changing consumer trends, but PSA has also given a very clear warning about the future. Nature abhors a vacuum, as does business. Industry is crying out for the clarity that it needs to invest in the future of this country, but all it sees coming out of Westminster is the squabbling, plotting and manoeuvring of Ministers in a Government completely paralysed by their own self-indulgent activities. If this news tells us anything, it is that business will not wait around while Ministers argue among themselves. I should make it clear that I do not include the Minister as one of those concerned more with their own future than with the country's, but I ask her to say to her colleagues that the posturing and prevarication has to stop.

It has been made repeatedly clear that without clarity on future trading arrangements, the UK car industry remains vulnerable. What assurances can the Minister give to my constituents that their future matters to all in the Government? The plant union, Unite, has shown that it can work positively with management, but it cannot do it on its own. It needs backing across the board from the Government, and support in the Budget that is approaching. I hope that the Minister will confirm that she is making a very strong case to the Treasury for a much greater level of support in terms of reducing plant costs and expanding the local supply chain. To that end, will she seek to meet those at the highest level of PSA and other stakeholders, including trade unions and local MPs, so that we can discuss how this support can be delivered as an urgent priority?

These are not just my constituents; they are my friends and neighbours. When I go back home, I want to tell them that Parliament is united and determined to give them all the backing required, so that the redundancies announced today are the last.

Mr Speaker: That was commendably within time, and a good example to other colleagues on both sides of the House.

Claire Perry: I absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that we stand ready to work with him and his colleagues, the local LEP, the local council and anyone else, including the unions, to make sure that we have a good outcome and also an investment outcome for the future. As he will know, there is a huge amount of cross-party consensus on our industrial strategy and our clean growth strategy. The resulting confidence is shown by the fact that over the past few months we have seen some very significant investment news from auto industries in Sunderland, in Burnaston in the east midlands, and in Oxford. There is a vote of confidence: let us make sure that it continues.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the UK automotive industry has in fact been a huge success story? Can she give assurances to PSA and others—I have companies in my constituency that

make parts for cars, so this is very important to them, too—that this Government will provide, with their industrial strategy, a framework that ensures there is a major emphasis on the automotive industry as we go forward, particularly in the new technologies such as electric cars, other electric vehicles and battery storage, to mention just a few?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend makes a compelling case. It has indeed been a success story, but I suspect that is not much comfort for those people going home tonight and discussing this over the tea table with their families. That is why we want to make absolutely sure that this country is the place for long-term investment. We know that this has happened as a result of the sales cycle, which has been disappointing for this car. We want to make sure that longer-term investment decisions in Ellesmere Port and other parts of the industry are backed up and supported and that this is the place to keep doing business in the auto sector.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) for securing this urgent question.

As we know, Vauxhall has announced that 400 jobs are potentially to be lost at the Ellesmere Port plant, only a few months after being bought by PSA Group. The Opposition warned at the time that Vauxhall's UK plants and the 40,000 people employed in the wider supply chain could be significantly at risk. In response, the Secretary of State said:

“The Prime Minister and I have been engaged in discussions...to ensure that the terms of the agreement can give confidence to Vauxhall's UK workforce now and for the future.”—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2017; Vol. 622, c. 570.]

Can the Minister confirm whether those discussions have been ongoing, and if so, what was their outcome? What conversations has she had with Vauxhall regarding the decision to move to a single production shift? It has been reported in the media that

“PSA made clear that future investments in the plant were on hold until negotiations on the UK's future with the European Union had become clearer.”

Can the Minister therefore confirm whether PSA has sought Nissan-style assurances from the Government's Brexit strategy? That has been much debated and discussed in the press, but we have not had any confirmation. If that is the case, what were those assurances and when were they given? If it is not, can she explain why the Secretary of State stepped in to support Nissan and, reportedly, Toyota, but not Vauxhall? Does she accept that such a case-by-case approach is the very antithesis of an industrial strategy and that the Government's shambolic handling of Brexit negotiations is, quite frankly, undermining British manufacturing and all who are reliant on it?

Finally, will the Minister confirm—I am not content with the responses we have had so far—that she will give PSA and other manufacturers a clear signal today that the Government are supporting the sector throughout the Brexit process, whatever the outcome may be?

Claire Perry: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the time, and as has been said again, the company made a commitment to keep the plant open, both at the time of the acquisition and at subsequent points. We believe that the company stands by that.

The hon. Lady asked whether there is dialogue. There is ongoing dialogue, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, with the company—we had another conversation with it today about what exactly this means—with those in the broader area supporting the workers and with the unions. It is incredibly important that we are all joined up on this.

I entirely reject the idea that we do not have a joined-up strategy when it comes to the auto sector. We have turned around a sector that was on its knees in 2008-09. Under this Government, it has been turned into one of the country's major investment and export stories, and we continue to invest for the future. As I have said, some models will do well and some will not. Companies need to know that this is the best place to invest for the future, so that the Ellesmere port plant can continue to be, as it was in 1964, a flagship manufacturing plant and so that we can retain high-skilled jobs in the UK and in the area.

The hon. Lady asked whether we are sending a clear signal. We continue to send a clear signal to this company and others that we will stand by them as the future evolves, to make sure that we are not left in the slow lane of technological innovation, but that we lead the world. We will reassure companies as much as possible about the certainty that we require from the Brexit negotiations—namely that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have made incredibly clear, we should have the closest possible relationship with the single market.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Is my hon. Friend working together with the company and local government to ensure that the skills of those highly-skilled people who may, sadly, lose their jobs in the next few weeks and months will be retained in the area and built on? One thing that we learned from Germany in the late 2000s, during the great recession, is that if those skills are retained in the area, it will be possible to boost not only other companies but Vauxhall if it begins, as we all hope it will, to take on people again in the future to work on other models.

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is vital that we maintain those skills. It is worth noting that there is a significant cluster of other businesses in the region, which is home to Bentley Motors, Jaguar Land Rover, Getrag Ford, Toyota's engine plant and Leyland Trucks. It is really important that we continue to invest in those skills to minimise job losses and to ensure that the country does not lose the talent that people have built up over the years.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): At the heart of this announcement, there are hundreds of families who are now worried about their futures. They will need more from the Government than warm words, so the Minister should ensure that they get the meaningful support that they need for their future.

Although the parent company has cited declining market share as a reason for its decision, it is also quoted as saying that it halted UK investment plans because of the Government's lack of “visibility on the future trading relationship with the EU”.

Figures show that direct foreign investment has vaporised in the UK. Instead of being given a level playing field—let alone the possibility of market advantage—business,

[Drew Hendry]

workers and communities continue to be let down by this long and humiliating Brexit chaos. Will the Minister admit that to secure the future of jobs and investment, the only sensible option is to remain in the single market and the customs union?

Claire Perry: As I have said, I do not think that anyone wants us to re-run the Brexit debate. We need to get on with this and make sure that the outcome—it represents the majority view in the constituencies that the majority of Government and Opposition Members represent, so we must deliver on it—is the best possible result for the workers of Ellesmere Port, the workers that support the industry and workers right across Britain's industrial and manufacturing base.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): We are exporting automobiles very successfully to the United States against a 10% tariff. How much better would we do with free trade?

Claire Perry: My right hon. Friend invites me to comment on the estimates held by Her Majesty's Treasury, but I can tell him that we are one of the major exporters of automobiles in Europe and around the world, and we need to maintain that. Indeed, we make and export one in five of the electric vehicles driven on the continent, so we are already pivoting towards that new technology. Let us make sure we get more investment, so that we can continue to employ more people in the future.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The Minister rightly praised the high levels of productivity and the skills of the workforce, and she mentioned—again, quite properly—the Government's industrial strategy, but what sort of industrial strategy is it that takes no account of the changes that have taken place in our currency since the referendum and, more importantly, what account does it take of our deteriorating and chaotic future relationship with the European Union?

Claire Perry: Focusing on today's announcement, my understanding is that domestic sales of the Astra have been the problem, not sales in Europe. The supply chain to the auto industry—the steel sector—has of course done rather well from the currency move, which has benefited many people working in other areas. We need to focus not on the vagaries of long-term currency movements, but on the long-term support we collectively give to this industry and the investment the Government can make in the technology of the future.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister may be aware that, when I was a councillor in the midlands a decade ago, we faced the challenges affecting Jaguar Land Rover at that time and the potentially dire warnings—[*Interruption.*] Well, we need only look at where it is today to deal with that heckle. What reassurance will the Minister give me that this company will be supported to move towards the sort of success that Jaguar Land Rover now enjoys, creating thousands of new jobs, despite the scepticism of Opposition Members?

Claire Perry: I commend my hon. Friend for his experience. Again, there are frequent, regular and detailed calls about the company's long-term strategy with regard to the UK and investment in this highly successful and

very productive plant and in the people who work there. I also want to point out that the Ellesmere Port enterprise zone and the cluster of businesses around it has been incredibly successful.

Justin Madders indicated dissent.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I am told by the head of the local enterprise partnership and the local council that it is, so perhaps he should consult a little more widely. I think that was a bit of low blow. This is about ensuring that we have the right support for the industry, that we have a thriving supply chain and that there are the best possible conditions for them to thrive and grow.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It did not take PSA long to renege on the assurances about investment that it gave the Secretary of State just a few months ago. Does the Minister accept that the workforce and the trade unions, over three successive new model rounds, have done everything that has been asked of them by the company and have achieved a level of performance that exceeded previous levels? May I suggest that sending in DWP officials is not the response that the Government should be making now? There should be a strong, robust response from her own Department, telling PSA, "It's not on."

Claire Perry: I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman that there has been an incredible level of performance by the people working in the plant. Indeed, Tony Woodley, a long-term member of the union from this plant who sits on the Automotive Council, just cannot speak highly enough about what has been achieved. [*Interruption.*] I have met him, because I chair that forum. Indeed, I spoke to Len McCluskey only today to discuss this situation.

We have to understand that when sales of models do not pan out as projected, there will inevitably be adjustments to a company's performance. We have to make sure that we put in place the long-term investment framework, give the company the assurances it needs to invest—as I have said, it has committed to keeping the plant open—and attract the next wave of technology to these shores, rather than see it go elsewhere.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): To lose 400 of the 1,800 local jobs is devastating news for Ellesmere Port, but I am struggling to understand the reasons given by the plant's French owner, PSA. The Government have said that the UK automotive sector is the most productive in Europe, with 50% higher productivity than overall UK manufacturing productivity, and that last year saw a 17-year high in the number of cars built in the UK, yet PSA has said:

"Current manufacturing costs at Ellesmere Port are significantly higher than those of the benchmark plants of the PSA Group in France."

How can the Government's statement be reconciled with the attitude of the French owners?

Claire Perry: I have not looked in detail at the operation and fixed-cost production, but I suspect that if the plant is running below full capacity—as we know it is—because sales are weaker than planned, the cost per unit produced

will be higher. That is why, before we have any further conversations with the company about the long-term prognosis, we need to be clear that while there may be blips in sales of particular models, we want PSA and other auto companies to keep their investment coming to the UK.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Eighty per cent. of the cars produced at Ellesmere Port are for mainland Europe and 75% of the parts to make the cars come from mainland Europe. What assurances can the Minister give that, when we leave the European Union, there will not be additional customs checks or barriers to trade, because if there are, more jobs will inevitably be lost, not just at Ellesmere Port, but elsewhere in the car sector and in manufacturing more widely?

Claire Perry: The hon. Lady and I are in complete agreement about the need for a frictionless and close relationship with the single market. However, I think that we would both welcome the fact that, since 2011, the value of parts that UK manufacturers source from the UK supply chain has increased from 36% to 41%. Of course, one of the opportunities for manufacturers is thinking about onshoring production that they would currently buy overseas. The hon. Lady and I want the best long-term outcome, but the Government want to make it clear that the supply chain is as supported as possible for the future, through the Brexit negotiations and beyond.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Minister reassure me that unfair or inconsistent application of the state aid rules is not putting British car manufacturing at a competitive disadvantage?

Claire Perry: I am happy to give those assurances. Everything we have to do needs to be put through the prism of state aid rules. We were one of the great proponents of a level playing field. We have always played by the state aid rules in a way that other countries perhaps do not. Everything that we do has to meet those tests. It does that and will continue to do so.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): When I negotiated in Government alongside the trade unions in the discussions with General Motors to save and then expand the plant, it was clear that the whole business model for Vauxhall car production—and van production at Luton—depended on the common standards in the single market and the common tariff in the customs union. Since the Minister cannot guarantee either, what equivalent measures will she put in place?

Claire Perry: The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is absolutely part of the negotiations, but we are considering one of more successful and vital industries, and the voices of those in the sector are heard loud and clear in my ears and those of the Secretary of State, and very publicly. If we want to protect the jobs and get the investment that means our children and our grandchildren will work in those plants, we must secure the best possible deal for UK car manufacturers and the UK economy.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Minister said earlier that the Government were standing by to help. She is correct: her predecessors in the job certainly stood by. When we asked for help with business rates and when colleagues across the House asked for help

with energy costs, they stood by. For the good of all my constituents who work in the supply chain and directly for Vauxhall, will the Minister do a little better and commit to membership of the single market and customs union, which will keep them in their jobs?

Claire Perry: I admire the hon. Lady for speaking so passionately for her constituents, many of whom commute daily to work in the plant. She is more than welcome to come to any of the conversations we have with the auto industry about long-term investment here. We need to secure investment for the future because the whole automotive world is changing and pivoting away from diesel and petrol towards different forms of technology. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) talks about pivoting, but I am afraid that that is the way the world is going and I am determined that Britain will be at the forefront so that we can capture investment for the future.

Of course, the plant has reduced numbers previously, and then built up again. I gently point out that when it comes to practical help for those who might be affected and for whom this is clearly a worrying time, the LEP, the local council, the Department for Work and Pensions and Unite are ensuring that support is there and that people can find work quickly, if that is what they desire. There is also the talent retention scheme. We do not want to lose the skills that have been built up over the past 50 years for the industry and the country. It is vital that we work together to save those.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Over 450 of the people who work at Ellesmere Port live on the Welsh side of the border, only 12 miles away. I am pleased that the Minister has said that she is meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure in Wales, Ken Skates, to discuss that. Will she give a commitment today to ensure that he is involved in discussions about the three big issues, which are cost, the performance in Europe and the clarity that the company seeks from the Government about future membership of the single market and a tariff-free economy?

Claire Perry: The devolved Administrations are of course rightly involved in all those conversations. I was heartened today to hear the head of Cheshire West and Chester Council say that they were working closely across the border, because they understand that so many people working in the plant commute across the border every day. It is interesting that that is perceived as the economic area, which crosses the border. It is absolutely right that we should not let artificial boundaries get in the way. On the issue of artificial boundaries, all of us in this House want a thriving automotive industry. As we have done with other strategic decisions, the more that we are all on the front foot on this together—showing that we are the place for future investment, rather than taking lumps out of each other across the Dispatch Box—the better.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I would remind the hon. Lady that we are substantial net importers of motor products from the EU and especially of high-value-added components in the supply chain. Now that we are leaving the EU, will the Minister and the Government look to using state aid and public procurement programmes to benefit British motor manufacturing and Vauxhall in particular?

Claire Perry: I pay tribute to the many people who I am sure live in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who work in the other major Vauxhall plant and who I know are as committed and productive as those in Ellesmere Port. He is absolutely right, and this is why we have to have the negotiation and why we have to come up with a good deal and ensure as seamless a relationship across borders as possible. He will know that 65% of the Luton plant's production is exported to the EU. We want to make sure that continues.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) *rose*—

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah! A sisterly contest. I call Maria Eagle.

Maria Eagle: Thank you, Mr Speaker; it is not helpful to call it a contest.

The Minister keeps saying that she wants frictionless access to the single market, but most of her colleagues in Government, in particular many in the Cabinet, are talking up the idea of leaving with no deal and walking out of the single market and the customs union. Given that the Ellesmere Port plant is weakened by going to a single shift and by losing skilled workers, as is inevitable, does she not understand that the general uncertainty caused by the lack of progress in the Brexit negotiations puts the plant at even greater risk in future of being fully and totally closed?

Claire Perry: I am not sure who the winner was in that contest, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right. She should not listen to the noises off, which people seem to be obsessed by, that are reported to come out of the Cabinet. There is an absolutely obvious view that we have to get a deal. We will get a deal that works for the UK and for businesses such as this in the UK, and we will have the opportunity over the next few days and weeks in the debate on the repeal Bill to show that we are unified on this and want to stand up for the businesses and those they employ in our constituencies.

Ms Angela Eagle: I have constituents who will be losing their jobs as a result of these extremely worrying announcements. The Minister has said that the Government are standing ready to help, but the future of the plant would certainly be enhanced if the plant were a front runner for a new model. What are the Government doing to ensure that it is?

Claire Perry: That is absolutely part of the conversation. I understand from listening to the general secretary of the union today and from talking to the company that decisions about the new model have to be taken in the next few years. It is incumbent on us all, therefore, to make sure that this is perceived as the best place to build that model. That is how to protect, preserve and enhance the jobs and productivity of the plant.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Many in my constituency will be devastated by the news of the threatened job losses at Vauxhall's Ellesmere Port plant. In the Secretary of State's statement on Nissan in Sunderland on 31 October last year, he said that the Government pledged to work vigorously with the car industry to ensure that more businesses and supply chains could locate in close proximity

to major manufacturing sites by upgrading sites and providing infrastructure. There is huge scope for that around the Ellesmere Port plant. He also indicated that in the EU negotiations the Government would work to ensure that trade between us and the EU

"can be free and unencumbered by impediments."—[*Official Report*, 31 October 2016; Vol. 616, c. 680.]

What progress can the Minister report on those two commitments?

Claire Perry: If the Secretary of State were at the Dispatch Box, he would stand by all those comments. The hon. Lady is right. The chief executive of the LEP was at pains to point out the opportunities available from working together within the enterprise zone at Ellesmere Port in terms of reducing energy costs, which I know the hon. Lady cares about, and enhancing the business environment. She is right, therefore, that local solutions can help with this problem. Fundamentally, however, we stand by, we want to support the company and the industry and we want to make sure that these investment decisions are made as quickly as possible.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I put it to the Minister, though, that she is still glossing over the broader context, particularly given that the chief executive of PSA has himself said that a key consideration in the long-term future of Ellesmere Port is "visibility" of the UK's future trading relationship with the EU. Is that uncertainty not also filtering through to the car market in the UK, where new car registrations were down 9.3% in October and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has said that economic and political uncertainty is a key consideration? Will she not accept what she has been told time and again—that ambiguous and contradictory messages from the Government about Britain's future as regards the Brexit negotiations are making a bad situation still worse?

Claire Perry: I accept that ambiguity is bad for investment—that applies right across the sectors—and that is why we need a deal as soon as possible. I point out, however, as I did at the start, that when this company, and indeed all these European companies, look across their manufacturing bases, they will see that British workers in these plants are the most productive in Europe. In the last 15 years, we have seen major investment in the industry, which is delivering both current and new models. It would be incredible if companies did not want to invest on that basis.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) said, the company's statement makes it clear that uncertainty over our future relations with EU is jeopardising future investment in the plant. The Minister is a reasonable person—she was one of a small band of brave Conservatives to rebel during the article 50 process—so I ask her to acknowledge that the Government's boneheaded determination to leave the single market and customs union is already costing jobs, livelihoods and prosperity up and down Britain.

Claire Perry: Just to clarify, the company's statement about this change relates to sales of the model, which are not reaching its forecast potential, but that is something that, with the best will in the world, can always happen if a company gets the design or marketing wrong. The House has to work together to deliver the best possible

deal for the country in the EU negotiations, and that is what the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are doing—*[Interruption.]* I have avoided making any political points in this statement, but it would be nice to hear just one position from Labour that its Members felt they could get behind for longer than 24 hours.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is another week in Parliament, another set of job losses in the north and another Minister being forced to come to the House to explain what the Government are doing. What has happened to the Government's northern powerhouse strategy?

Claire Perry: I remind the hon. Lady that urgent questions are always tabled about job losses, but I do not recall ever answering one about job announcements. We have the lowest level of unemployment in the country for 40 years and the highest level of employment among women and young people. It is a fact that overall the UK economy has been a huge jobs-creating success in the last eight years. However, there will always be bumps, concerns that come along, particularly for people who are worried. In the run-up to Christmas, this is a very worrying time. That is why I do not have to be forced to come to the Chamber; I am very happy to come here and try to reassure Members on both sides of the House and the constituents whom they represent.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister spoke about the widespread consultations and the need to send the right messages. Given the importance of the European single market to the motor industry—productivity and exports—what conversations is she having with Cabinet Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers? They are prepared to leave the European Union irrespective of our commitment to the single market. What messages does she think that that is sending to would-be investors in this crucial industry?

Claire Perry: I assure the hon. Gentleman that both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I hear the messages loud and clear from the auto sector and, indeed, from the business community as a whole—from businesses large and small. My right hon. Friend is assiduous in ensuring that the voice of business is considered in every aspect of the EU negotiations. That is what we have been doing. We continue to work on the best possible deal for Britain, and we will get behind it.

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): Last week it was Monarch, headquartered in my constituency. This week it is Vauxhall, headquartered in my constituency. Yet the Minister did not once use the word “Brexit” during her statement. Does she believe that these redundancies are being caused primarily by a lack of consumer confidence stemming from the Government's chaotic approach to Brexit negotiations, or by a lack of investor confidence stemming from the Government's lack of competence and leadership on Brexit?

Claire Perry: I was not at the Dispatch Box to answer questions about Monarch, but I understood that it was a very troubled company that was burdened with debt, and other airlines have reported record passenger numbers over the summer. The statement that we made last week about BAE Systems concerned the delay in landing

some important overseas orders, and I hope that the House recognised how committed the Department was to ensuring that those orders were delivered.

Let me say again that this is not about Brexit. It is about a lack of sales of a model that is sold both in the United Kingdom and in Europe, which is having a near-term impact on the shift pattern at this port.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Chair. Let me begin by saying that I feel very much for the people and families who are affected by this announcement.

Earlier in the year, the Prime Minister sought reassurances about safeguarding jobs. Clearly that was all a bit “peace in our time”. This is not actually about petrol, diesel, electric or C-segment; otherwise, why has the plant in Gliwice, in Poland, not been affected by similar closures? Carlos Tavares, the PSA chief executive, has said that it is hard to decide on the group's strategy owing to a lack of clarity over the UK's plans to leave the European Union. The jobs—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman quite understands. In these situations, what is needed is a short question, and the Chair—as the hon. Gentleman generously described me—needs evidence that a question mark will appear before long. It is not an occasion for a series of observations; it is a question to the Minister.

Matt Western: Thank you for clarifying that, Chair. *[Laughter.]* Sorry—Mr Speaker.

May I suggest that the Minister speak to Professor David Bailey of Aston university, and find out more about the impact on the components business, which underlies the reason for seeking to reduce the number of jobs in the UK? It is about the supply chain and Brexit; it is not about the C-segment.

Claire Perry: Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman. I chair the Automotive Council for the Government. The council brings together vital representatives of the manufacturing companies that are based here and of the supply chain, as well as technology leaders and union representatives. I spend a great deal of time talking to representatives of the industry about what is affecting their businesses. This is exceptionally disappointing for all the families who may be having conversations over the tea table tonight, but it is due to a failure to deliver on the sales projections for the Astra. It is our collective job to ensure that the industry has confidence in the UK when it comes to investment in the future.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): As chair of the all-party regional group covering this area and former chair of the Automotive Council, I recently attended a Toyota event celebrating 25 years of production at the nearby Deeside plant, and the message coming from the automotive sector in connection with all different types of production is that the lack of clarity from the Cabinet and Government on this issue is undermining the sector. That is the clear message from the industry, and this Government need to get themselves in order. Will the Minister speak to the Cabinet to ensure that the united line she is talking about is conveyed to them?

Claire Perry: Forgive me, but the hon. Gentleman may be a bit behind on his facts. In March of this year Toyota announced a quarter of a billion pounds of new investment to upgrade its Burnaston plant in the east midlands. In July BMW announced that it will be producing the electric Mini here. These actions and investments are safeguarding thousands of jobs in our constituencies, and we should all be proud of that.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Foreign direct investment has fallen from a £120 billion surplus before the referendum to a £25 billion deficit after. Vauxhall is of course part of that figure. Does the Minister still think this is nothing to do with the disastrous Brexit negotiations?

Claire Perry: At some point we have to accept that we have to get through these negotiations, that the best way to do that is to show a unified face to Europe, and that the most important thing to do is secure the millions of jobs and the billions of pounds of investment we need to continue to grow. Frankly, it is a bit rich for the hon. Gentleman to be trying to make the case for the Government being divided on Brexit when his own Front Bench does not have a clue what its Brexit position is today, let alone yesterday.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The future of Vauxhall and every other motor manufacturer in this country depends on gaining the next model. What message does the Minister think her chaotic Brexit policy is sending to the people in the parent companies who are making those investment decisions today?

Claire Perry: My strong suspicion is that all auto companies are thinking about the future models being partially or fully electric, and about how they might introduce self or autonomous driving capabilities.

This Government have sent some pretty clear signals that we think that is the way we should go, partly for all the air quality benefits that brings. I think the hon. Gentleman should be celebrating the fact that this Government have committed a quarter of a billion pounds to the Faraday challenge, to get the next generation of electric vehicle technology together, and over half a billion pounds from the public and private sectors to make sure we lead the world in connected and autonomous vehicles. That is the future of the models in this country. The manufacturers understand that, and we need to get the investment to ensure that the jobs we are talking about today are protected.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I urge the Minister to redouble her efforts to support staff. PSA flagged up concerns over the competitiveness of this plant. Can the Minister explain how the competitiveness of this and other UK car plants, which rely so heavily on just-in-time production, will be maintained, let alone enhanced, post-Brexit, once more burdensome customs rules kick in, risking turning just-in-time production into never-on-time production?

Claire Perry: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say several times during this urgent question that that is exactly why we need to make sure we have the minimal amount of friction in terms of the supply chain. Indeed, the UK percentage of the supply chain is rising, which can only be helpful as it is much better for logistics. We should all pay tribute to something the right hon. Gentleman referenced: the incredible productivity and skill level built up by the people working in this plant, which we should all be focused on, and which is why Britain continues to be the best place for automotive investment. We have wonderful workers in this and other plants, and we want to be investing to support them in the future.

Points of Order

5.24 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Friday, I emailed the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union's office at 12:08. The email was acknowledged by his office at 12:21. At 15:03 precisely, my letter was on the Guido Fawkes website. Mr Speaker, you may be aware of Guido Fawkes, and I am sure that he will get pleasure from the fact that I am mentioning his website here today, but could you explain how I can ensure that the Minister's office is just as prompt in giving me a reply to my inquiry as it appears to have been in giving that inquiry to the Guido Fawkes website?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has raised his concern in a very reasonable tone, and I am grateful to him for giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter. I understand his concern and—all attempted jocularity aside—this is in fact quite a serious subject. The handling of Members' correspondence by Government Departments is of course a matter for the Ministers concerned rather than for me, and I do not know how his email to the Department for Exiting the European Union found its way to a third-party website, but I strongly agree with the principle that Members of this House should be able to assume that their correspondence with Departments will be treated in confidence and with respect. It should not be lobbed in the direction of some website. That is a pretty extraordinary state of affairs and I would hope that the Secretary of State will at some point have something to say about the matter. The Secretary of State himself is a very long-serving and distinguished parliamentarian, and he treats the House with respect, so he might well have a view on the matter. I hope that we will hear that view sooner rather than later.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I hope that this is a point of order that you can deal with. Yesterday, I drove into the House of Commons car park because I was going to do some constituency work. I pulled in, and next to my vehicle was a car being recharged. It was an electric car, and there is nothing wrong with that; it was also a foreign car. The problem is that it appeared to be a Labour campaign vehicle. It had "Labour" all over it, and it clearly did not seem to be a Member's car. I understand that the Labour party has had some problems with parking at its new offices, but I do not think that it is correct, sir, that we should have its cars parked here. Is it perhaps the case that Labour is interested in the many paying for its electricity bill?

Mr Speaker: I am most intrigued by the point of order raised by the hon. Gentleman, for two reasons. First of all, I think he invests me with an immediate

wisdom that I cannot claim to possess on a matter which, in the previous eight years and four months of my Speakership, has not been raised with me in this Chamber in that way. I am therefore bound to say that I must reflect upon the matter. Secondly, I am even more intrigued by the sense on the part of the hon. Gentleman that it is possible to distinguish a car that belongs to a Member from any other car. My car is a very ordinary car and I do not think that there is anything to suggest that it belongs to a Member rather than to some other person, but I will look into this matter. I hope that that provides satisfaction to the hon. Gentleman and of course, very importantly, to Mrs Bone.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier this afternoon, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) asked the Home Secretary an important question about why the Intelligence and Security Committee had not been reconstituted since the election, and indeed had not met since April. I do not think that she can have heard or understood the question correctly, because she did not give my hon. Friend an answer. This is incredibly serious—as I am sure you appreciate, Mr Speaker, as the champion of this place—because that Committee scrutinises the important work of the Government and the intelligence services. We have had a number of dreadful terrorist attacks and all sorts of allegations about Russian interference in our democratic process, and the Committee needs to get on with its job. Will you please ensure that my hon. Friend gets a proper response from the Home Secretary or the relevant Secretary of State? It is unacceptable for the ISC not to be doing its work for such a long time?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I certainly agree that the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) ought to have an answer to the question that he did ask, rather than perhaps to one which he did not. If there was a failure to answer, I am sure that it was inadvertent rather than calculated. More widely, I point out to the House that the method of composition of the Intelligence and Security Committee is different from that of other Committees. It is a Committee of Parliament, but it is not a Select Committee, so it was not constituted in the same way or at the same time as the other Committees. However, its work is just as important and as pressing as the work of any of the Select Committees of Parliament, so I agree that it is important that it should be constituted and up and running as quickly as possible. This is a point that I am happy to mention to the Leader of the House myself, but I rather hope that Members who feel strongly about it might be inclined to raise the matter with the Leader of the House, perhaps at the upcoming business questions, at which time I eagerly anticipate that the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) will be in his seat and leaping up and down with enthusiasm from it.

Nuclear Safeguards Bill

[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 9 October on Hinkley Point C, HC 393. Fourth Report of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee of Session 2016-17, Leaving the EU: negotiation priorities for energy and climate change policy, HC 909.]

Second Reading

5.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is straightforward. It ensures that when the United Kingdom is no longer a member of the European Atomic Energy Community—Euratom—we will have in place a legal framework that meets our future international obligations on nuclear safeguarding. Nuclear safeguards demonstrate to the international community that civil nuclear material is not diverted into military or weapons programmes. It is important to be clear about the definitions in and scope of the Bill, because nuclear safeguards are distinct from nuclear safety, which is about the prevention of nuclear accidents, and from nuclear security, which relates to the physical protection of nuclear material. Those topics are subject to different regulatory regimes.

Our current nuclear safeguards obligations arise from our voluntary offer agreement—an additional protocol—with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA is the UN-associated body responsible for the oversight of the global non-proliferation regime. The first requirement flowing from the UK's commitments on safeguards is to have a domestic system that allows the state to know what civil nuclear material it has, where it is and whether any has been withdrawn from civil activities.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Following conversations with the leadership of the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy, which is in my constituency, does the Secretary of State agree that their stance on Euratom is not about Euratom itself, but about knowing when all the details will be finalised?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend, who has a close connection with his constituents who work at Culham, is absolutely right. He knows that we are keen to agree the greatest possible continuity for the arrangements for research at Culham as soon as possible.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is nothing in the Bill that will prevent us from seeking associate membership or arrangements with Euratom under article 206 of the existing Euratom treaty, and that it remains Government policy to seek to do so?

Greg Clark: I can confirm that the Bill has been prepared on a contingency basis. The discussions around our continued arrangements with Euratom and with the rest of the European Union have not been concluded, but it is right to put in place in good time any commitments that are needed in primary legislation. Euratom has served the United Kingdom and our nuclear industries well, so we want to see maximum continuity of those arrangements.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): My right hon. Friend has just confirmed that the Bill is necessary only because the Government have announced their intention to leave Euratom. I voted against the proposal when it was put to the House before the last general election, and I have yet to hear a rational reason for our leaving Euratom. As all our previously satisfactory arrangements for nuclear safeguarding are set aside, all our existing agreements with the IAEA are put in difficulty. Safeguarding is necessary to comply with the non-proliferation treaties, to which we apply a great deal of importance.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may be the Father of the House, but that does not allow him to make a speech when everybody else is waiting. He has more experience of this House than I will ever have, and he ought to use it.

Mr Clarke: Will the Secretary of State give an argument in favour of abolishing a satisfactory arrangement that has lasted for almost 50 years?

Mr Deputy Speaker: It might have been helpful if the right hon. and learned Gentleman had asked that question to begin with, rather than giving a speech.

Greg Clark: Triggering article 50 of the treaty on European Union also requires triggering article 50 on membership of Euratom. That is not just the Government's view; it is the European Commission's view, too. The Commission clearly stated to the European Parliament that,

“in accordance with Article 106(a) of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union applies also to the European Atomic Energy Community.”

That is the basis on which we are considering these safeguards.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that, as we leave the EU, the Bill will enable us to develop our own watertight system for complying with nuclear safeguards? As he says, that means introducing reporting and transparency to make it obvious that no nuclear material is going where it should not be going. We want assurances that all these boxes will be ticked, even if we leave Euratom.

Greg Clark: That is precisely the point of the Bill, and I will explain, perhaps at some length, the ways in which it might be done. I hope my hon. Friend will stay for that.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is being generous in giving way. We heard clearly enough that this is a contingency Bill. What I did not hear clearly is the Government's policy on staying in Euratom. He says that the treaty requires us to come out, which is debatable. If it is the Government's policy that we want associate membership status, will he make that clear now? Maximum continuity is a rather vague concept.

Greg Clark: It is very clear that membership of Euratom requires membership of the European Union, which is why we have this Bill. We have been satisfied with the arrangements we have, and part of the negotiation will be to ensure the greatest possible continuity, but that is to be negotiated with Euratom and the partners involved.

I have mentioned that the first requirement flowing from our commitments on safeguards is to have a domestic system that allows the state to know what civil nuclear material there is and where it is located, but the second fundamental principle of the global non-proliferation and safeguards regime is that there is some oversight of the system independent of the country itself. That provides obvious and necessary reassurance to the international community that material from civil nuclear programmes is not used other than for civil activities.

The UK has been a member of Euratom since 1 January 1973, and Euratom has carried out elements of both the domestic and the international activities set out in our agreements with the IAEA. The UK's agreement with the IAEA on safeguards is a trilateral agreement, reflecting the relationship between the UK and Euratom. Upon withdrawal from Euratom, however, the UK's main agreements with the IAEA will become ineffective, as they are predicated on Euratom membership. We are in discussions with the IAEA to agree replacements that reflect the UK domestic regime, including continued international verification by the IAEA. The Bill gives us the ability to give effect to precisely that regime. We have been working closely with the Office for Nuclear Regulation to ensure it will be ready to take on responsibilities for nuclear safeguarding that are currently delegated to Euratom inspectors.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Many professionals in the nuclear industry and outside academics are seriously concerned about the ongoing problem of what to do with nuclear waste from the civil programmes. Will the new arrangements simply parallel exactly what Euratom is doing or will they be stronger? Is the Minister not concerned that we still have to deal with the serious problem of long-term storage of civil nuclear waste?

Greg Clark: Let me say two things. First, we want to see maximum continuity of the standards—we do not want any reduction in them, as they have served us well and they give confidence to the industry. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman knows, from his many years in this House, that successive Governments have taken forward our long-term disposal of nuclear waste, and work on a long-term repository is being conducted, but that is a domestic responsibility, as it always has been.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's approach. Will he confirm it will mean that all the operational work that happens in the relevant plants will continue as if nothing had changed? It is done to a high standard and we wish to preserve those standards.

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I say, I do not think anyone regards the arrangements that have prevailed as deficient, so it makes sense to replicate them as we can. We are being orderly in making sure that we have the right domestic framework in place in good time.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) referred to the fact that we have to make all these international agreements which have previously been reflected in agreements between the EU and international bodies and other countries. Is any

other country outside the EU objecting to the likelihood that we will be seeking to make these arrangements, or to be a full member of the IAEA in our own right, with a voluntary agreement that it proposes?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend will doubtless be aware that across the international community there is great recognition that there is little contention in this area. It is obviously in the global interest to have robust arrangements in place, and the discussions are taking place smoothly and without any contention.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on pursuing this issue with calm and decency. Will he take the opportunity to reflect on some of the scare nonsense that we heard earlier, particularly with regards to medical radioisotopes? That was front page—it was said that people would not be able to get their treatment—but nothing at all in our decision would ever stop the export of any of those medical radioisotopes to non-EU countries.

Greg Clark: My right hon. Friend is right; there is nothing in that at all.

Let me state it another way: the Bill enables the United Kingdom to set up a domestic safeguards regime to enable us to meet international safeguards and nuclear non-proliferation standards after we withdraw from Euratom, no matter what the outcome of the negotiations. So we are being prudent and prepared, taking these steps now, in very good time. The ONR does not currently have this role because, under the Euratom treaty, all members, including the UK, subject their civil nuclear material and facilities to nuclear safeguards inspections and assurance carried out by Euratom. Euratom then provides reporting on member states' safeguards to the IAEA, which conducts nuclear safeguards globally. The United Kingdom's new regime, established under this Bill, will ensure that the UK has the right regime in place to enable the ONR to regulate nuclear safeguards following withdrawal from Euratom—it could not be more simple. That will ensure that the UK continues to maintain its position as a responsible nuclear state following withdrawal from Euratom.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State assure me that interested parties in the industry, principally the Nuclear Industry Association and Prospect, the trade union, which represents most workers in the industry, will continue to be consulted, as at the moment neither is convinced that the Bill is better than Euratom?

Greg Clark: I will certainly make that commitment. One feature of the nuclear industry is that it is, appropriately, highly consultative. People from across the sector talk to each other. It is a community of experts and they take advice. We will certainly continue to do that.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Nuclear Industry Association, with which I have meetings and with which the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington) meets regularly. The NIA has said clearly that the publication of the Bill

“is a necessary legislative step in giving responsibility for safeguards inspections to the UK regulator”.

[Greg Clark]

I have been clear with the House that the Bill is a prudent and timely set of measures that does not prejudice the discussions we will have with Euratom. I regard it as a model of good order.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab) *rose*—

Greg Clark: I give way to the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

Rachel Reeves: The Secretary of State says that he speaks regularly to the experts in the sector and industry; can he give an example of anybody in the industry who would prefer the powers to be transferred to the ONR rather than for us to stay in Euratom? Is there anyone?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady justifies what I said at the outset. The arrangements we have had with Euratom have been perfectly satisfactory, and we want to see maximum continuity. I hope she would agree, though, that it is necessary and prudent to take legislative steps so that if we are not able to conclude a satisfactory agreement—I do not expect that—we nevertheless have a world-class nuclear safeguarding regime. I would have thought she would welcome our doing that in good time and sensibly.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The decommissioning of the UK's ageing nuclear estate is a critical aspect of Euratom's work, yet there is not a single mention in the Bill of decommissioning. Will the Secretary of State explain how the 17 nuclear sites that are currently in the process of decommissioning, including Trawsfynydd in my constituency, will be regulated and properly staffed and have the necessary expertise if the UK leaves Euratom?

Greg Clark: There is no difference in the arrangements. As I say, the Bill makes provisions for a safeguarding regime. It is not about safety or security; it is about making sure it can be verified that nuclear material that is used in the civil sector does not cross to other uses. The robust arrangements supervised by the ONR that we have in place for decommissioning continue.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), the Secretary of State said that Ministers regularly meet various industry experts and bodies. Will he go further and say that by the time the Bill is enacted it will contain a clause that says it is necessary to consult the industry as widely as possible? The trade unions and the trade bodies currently feel left out.

Greg Clark: Such consultation is the universal practice in the nuclear sector. The hon. Gentleman might serve on the Bill Committee, so perhaps he will be able to interrogate the issues he raises, but at every point the nuclear sector proceeds not through the unilateral fiat of Governments but appropriately, on the basis of expert advice. That is the culture of the nuclear industry and it will continue.

As I set out for the House in my written statement in September, our intention is for the new domestic regime to exceed the standard that the international community

would expect from the UK as a member of the IAEA. The objective is for it to be as robust and comprehensive as that currently provided by Euratom. We are perfectly satisfied with the high standards that have prevailed under Euratom, so we do not want to take the opportunity to weaken them. As I have mentioned, we will also be agreeing new safeguards agreements with the IAEA. My officials have had meetings with officials from the IAEA at their headquarters in Vienna to take the discussions forward, and I am pleased to report that they are progressing extremely well.

On other aspects of the Euratom relationship, we have made it clear that we want to continue the successful co-operation. In June, I announced the Government's commitment to underwrite the UK's fair share of the costs for the Joint European Torus—the leading nuclear fusion facility in Oxfordshire—which supports 1,300 jobs, and we will continue to do that.

Let me briefly take the House through the clauses of the Bill. It is not a long Bill, as the House knows. Clause 1 amends the Energy Act 2013 to replace the Office for Nuclear Regulation's existing nuclear safeguards purposes with a new definition. The ONR will regulate the new nuclear safeguards regime using its existing relevant functions and powers, so the measure is about clarifying its purposes. Clause 1 will also amend the Act by creating new powers so that we can set out in regulations the detail of the domestic safeguards regime, such as on accounting, reporting, and control and inspection arrangements.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The Nuclear Industry Association has made it absolutely clear that this legislation is necessary, but it has also spelled out that the best outcome would be for the UK to continue with some form of membership of Euratom. Will my right hon. Friend give the House an idea of whether he feels that the discussions so far with Euratom make it likely that we will be able to achieve some form of continuation of the existing arrangement?

Greg Clark: As I have made it repeatedly clear, we regard the arrangements with Euratom as having served this country well and we want to see maximum continuity. As far as I can see, all members of the nuclear industry regard that as being the case. This is a good example of where I hope it will be possible to agree quickly and with a maximum of consensus a regime that continues the high standards that we have observed.

John Woodcock: As the Secretary of State is of course aware, there is an extended search to find a new investor in the NuGen site. Potential buyers are looking on that with great interest. In his closest possible working with Euratom—or whatever his phrase was—is there a scenario in which there will not need to be new nuclear co-operation agreements, which could make the sale much more complicated and problematic?

Greg Clark: The fact of this legislation should send a signal to the world that we are absolutely determined to be forward facing and to make sure that we have a regime in place that can continue the high standards that we enjoy while pursuing, in negotiation with Euratom and with other countries, the same continuity of arrangements that we have enjoyed. I see absolutely no obstacle to that.

Clause 2 will create a limited power, enabling regulations to amend the Nuclear Safeguards and Electricity (Finance) Act 1978; the Nuclear Safeguards Act 2000; and the Nuclear Safeguards (Notification) Regulations 2004. This narrow power will mean that cross references in that legislation to existing agreements with the IAEA can be updated once new international agreements have been reached.

Let me summarise the four key points. We are totally committed to the current and future prosperity of the nuclear industry. It is an important part of our energy future, our security as a nation and our commitment to clean energy. We are committed to meeting all our international obligations and to retaining our world-leading status on nuclear research and development. We need the powers in the Bill to give the existing independent nuclear regulator—the ONR—a new role to regulate nuclear safeguards, alongside its existing role regulating the UK's nuclear safety and security.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way one more time. I am not sure whether he is coming to an end, but he has not yet responded to the intervention on radioisotopes of the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). Does that mean that the Nuclear Industry Association, Dame Sue Ion, the honorary president of the National Skills Academy for Nuclear, and the Royal College of Radiologists are right to express concerns about the future possible supply of radioisotopes, especially given that, in the past, there have been global shortages? The Euratom supply chain was prominent in managing those shortages of supplies.

Greg Clark: Radioisotopes are not in scope of the measures before us today; this is about safeguards; and I replied perfectly adequately to my right hon. Friend.

The Bill sits alongside other work streams around our future relationship with Euratom, with the International Atomic Energy Agency and with third countries, and as such has been drafted to cater for a variety of possible outcomes to these talks. I want to reiterate our commitment to maximum continuity of these arrangements. The reason we are leaving Euratom is the decision to leave the European Union. The two treaties are uniquely legally joined. We continue to support Euratom and want to see a continuity of co-operation and standards and a close future partnership with it.

We do not know what the final arrangements will be, so we are doing what any responsible Government would do by putting in place now a civil nuclear safeguards regime for the United Kingdom through this Bill so that we will be fully prepared whatever the outcome of negotiations. I commend this Bill to the House.

5.55 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): As the Secretary of State has outlined, this Bill will provide the legal framework for establishing a domestic nuclear safeguards regime. Nuclear safeguards are essential obligations to ensure that work and materials for civil nuclear do not get transposed into work or preparations for military nuclear, and that is done under the umbrella of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Arguably, the UK already has a perfectly good set of nuclear safeguards through its membership of Euratom, so why is the Bill needed?

The Bill is a contingency measure, as the Secretary of State has helpfully illustrated. If we are to leave Euratom, and if there is no associate membership that gives us continued nuclear safeguarding provisions, we will need to put in place a new system of safeguarding, and that needs to be to the satisfaction of the International Atomic Energy Authority. Now that takes us into rather strange territory: we have not yet left Euratom; it is not clear whether we have to leave Euratom; the House has not agreed that we should leave Euratom; and we have not put in place any parliamentary procedure for agreeing that we should leave Euratom. In effect, the Bill is based wholly on the declaration that the Prime Minister made in her letter to the EU informing it that we were going to invoke article 50—

Greg Clark: Is the hon. Lady saying that it is wrong for this House and this Government to prepare, in a prudent and orderly way, to maintain the excellent safeguards that we have? Is she somehow criticising that preparedness?

Rebecca Long Bailey: Clearly, the Secretary of State was not listening to what I was saying. If he displays some patience, he will hear a bit more about my thoughts on the Bill's contents.

Euratom was agreed to as a body and a treaty before the EU treaty came about, and to that extent it is, arguably, separate from the actual formation and operation of the EU. That of course is the subject of fierce legal debate. It is true that its disputes mechanism does involve the European Court of Justice, and its terms include the free movement of scientists but those are specifically applied to civil nuclear activities and do not stray on to a wider canvas. Subject to legal debate, it certainly may have been possible—

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right that it is debateable whether, legally, we have to leave Euratom. Would it not be helpful if the Secretary of State published the legal advice that he has obtained? As a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, I have heard a number of experts saying a number of things about this very matter.

Rebecca Long Bailey: It certainly would be helpful for the House to hear about the discussions that have been taking place between the Government's legal advisers and the Government. The Library has helpfully provided a number of solicitors who have disputed the point that the Secretary of State puts forward. There is legal discourse going on that disputes the fact that Euratom and the EU are intrinsically linked.

John Redwood: Does the hon. Lady remember the long debates on the article 50 letter and the legislation to approve it? It was made very clear in those debates that we would probably have to leave Euratom at the same time and that we would therefore plan on that basis. She and many of her right hon. and hon. Friends voted for the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill knowing that.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I earlier urged the Secretary of State to display a little bit of patience. If the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) did the same, he might hear some of the answers he requires in the remainder of my contribution.

[*Rebecca Long Bailey*]

Subject to legal debate, it certainly may have been possible—had the Prime Minister not taken the unnecessary step of specifically including Euratom in her letter to the Commission—to retain the UK’s membership of Euratom. At worst, we could have secured a close association with Euratom that was good enough to allow the continuation of nuclear safeguarding within that amended framework.

The Opposition believe that continued membership of Euratom or a close associated status with it is possible and necessary for the efficient, continued working of a whole raft of procedures relating to the nuclear industry, not just safeguarding. We see this procedure of starting to set up identical but separate processes, instead of a relationship with Euratom, very much as a last resort or a back-up measure. We are frankly disappointed that the Government seem to be putting rather more effort into this than into seeking to maintain an arrangement with a body that does all this perfectly well, although the effort put into this Bill is also questionable. I will come to that in due course.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Is the hon. Lady aware that the European Commission itself has said that no country that leaves the EU can continue being a member of Euratom? Is the Commission wrong?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Gentleman would do well to keep up. I have mentioned several times that there is a current legal discourse regarding this very issue. Perhaps he should refer to that.

Robert Neill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rebecca Long Bailey: I will just make some progress, if I may.

We have to be clear that the measures set out in the Bill are just a part of the process of disentangling ourselves from Euratom and replacing its provisions with satisfactory alternatives that allow the UK’s nuclear industry to continue working smoothly in conjunction with its international partners and not to face a cliff edge of uncertainty. Indeed, the position paper on the nuclear industry issued by the UK Government in the spring of this year lists a number of key activities of Euratom that are not covered by the nuclear safeguarding issue, but which are essential to place into a UK legislative framework if a tenable regime for nuclear power in the UK is to be created before Brexit.

One example is that we will need to reach an agreement on the international supply chain for nuclear reactors. Without such an arrangement in place, it is possible that the existing nuclear power stations such as Sizewell B will be forced to close until such time as the agreement is sorted out. The UK will need to conclude individual and separate nuclear co-operation agreements with non-EU countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, South Africa, Kazakhstan, the United States of America and others. We will need to agree new inspections with the IAEA. The status of supply chains such as nuclear isotopes for medical treatment will need to be maintained, supplied by reactors in EU countries. There is the issue of research in nuclear technology including, importantly, the fusion research carried out at the Joint European Torus facility in Culham, which the Secretary of State

has already mentioned. These are all at serious risk if a fully worked-out series of agreements is not in place to allow these activities continuous operation. Working out a way to honour our safeguarding commitments under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is only the start of the process and we should not delude ourselves that achievement of that solves the Euratom issue. It does not.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The hon. Lady’s position seems to be that there is legal uncertainty about whether it is necessary for the UK to leave Euratom and that we should have left the issue until further in the negotiations, finding out whether we were leaving later on in the process. Would that not have just left rather less time to prepare if we did have to leave?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The point I am making is that there is legal uncertainty. Sadly, the Prime Minister firmly closed the door on the Euratom position, when it could have been left open. We could have passed this Bill through Parliament while questioning whether the legal position on Euratom membership was as the Commission states.

Mr Duncan Smith *rose*—

Robert Neill *rose*—

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con) *rose*—

Rebecca Long Bailey: I will make some progress, if I may.

The Government stated in their notes on the Queen’s Speech that the Bill to be introduced on the future of safeguarding would also

“protect UK electricity supplied by nuclear power”.

This Bill clearly does not do that, which is perhaps why that claim has been dropped from the description of the Bill. But the challenge centrally remains, and it is likely that another Bill will be necessary to protect that electricity in its entirety. Will the Minister confirm when that legislation will be introduced?

Let us assume for the time being that maintaining membership of Euratom is not possible—by far the worst case scenario. How have the Government chosen to implement their limited stab at replacing the nuclear safeguarding regime? Well, they have chosen to do so by giving the Secretary of State all the power to make the changes. The Bill contains powers for the Secretary of State, by order, to provide all the detail and fill in the dots of the legislative changes without further meaningful recourse to the Floor of the House.

Clause 1 will give the Secretary of State powers to introduce substantial amendments to the UK’s safeguarding procedures and give effect to international agreements that are yet even to begin being negotiated without any further primary legislation. Furthermore, the Secretary of State will be given the power—also by order—to amend retrospectively, and without further meaningful recourse to the Floor of the House, no fewer than three pieces of existing legislation. Not only that, but he will have the power to amend those pieces of legislation, as the Government acknowledge in their explanatory notes accompanying the Bill, based on the outcome of negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency that the Government accept are not complete.

We have to take on trust that the negotiation with the IAEA to which Parliament will not be a party will proceed satisfactorily, and that the Secretary of State, in his infinite wisdom, will table the necessary amendments to primary and secondary legislation that will give effect to those agreements, whatever they are. While I am on this point, will the Secretary of State confirm the progress of such agreements and negotiations, and provide details?

Greg Clark: I hope the hon. Lady will be reassured if she actually reads the Bill. It is clear that the power to amend the legislation that she pointed out—I hope that she can see what I am pointing out—is limited to

“consequential, supplementary or incidental provision...transitional, transitory or saving provision.”

It is not a general power. It is intended to ensure that the transposition of one set of regulations to another can be made efficiently.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Let me take the Secretary of State on a little journey. If he listens carefully, he might see how dangerous the scope of certain parts of the Bill might be. The explanatory notes indicate that regulations under clause 1 will be subject to the affirmative procedure only “on first use”. It would be helpful if he confirmed that that wording is actually a terrible mistake, that he does not actually mean it and that, at the very least, all legislation on the domestic safeguarding regime will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

I would never cast aspersions on the Secretary of State, but, unfortunately, his ministerial colleagues have shown that they are prepared to use their delegated powers not just to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, but arguably to legislate in open defiance of the House. In particular, I refer to the recent rise in university tuition fees. The original Act allowed any statutory instrument raising the limit to be annulled by either House. Unfortunately, the Government first prevented any vote whatever, and then refused to accept the vote of the House against the regulations. In effect, they used secondary legislation to rule by ministerial decree. They tabled the regulations the day before Christmas recess and the Opposition tabled a prayer against them on the first sitting day after that. But, despite the conventions of the House, the Government dragged their feet for months until eventually conceding the point and scheduling a debate on 18 April. Of course, the Prime Minister dissolved Parliament before that vote could be held. After the election, the new Leader of the House said that there were “no plans” to allow time for the vote that her predecessor had solemnly promised from the Dispatch Box. It was left to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to secure parliamentary time under the rules of Standing Order No. 24. In that debate, the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation tried to deny that any vote had been secured, leading Mr Speaker to intervene and tell the House:

“I had thought there was an expectation of a debate and a vote, and that the Opposition had done what was necessary”.—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 895-6.]

Tom Pursglove: To return to the substance of the Bill, which is about contingency, will the hon. Lady confirm that at 10 o'clock tonight the Opposition will vote against that contingency?

Rebecca Long Bailey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, but we are talking about very important arguments regarding the machinery of this House. If he will let me conclude my remarks, he might learn something very important.

Eventually, we had to use an Opposition day motion to revoke the regulations. The House agreed to it, only for the Government to refuse to accept the result after telling their Members to boycott the vote. When the Government say that Parliament still has a say on delegated legislation, there is a catch, and it is a Catch-22: they can refuse time for a vote within the 40 days and then say that it is too late for any vote to count once that deadline has passed. The Bill includes a power to amend primary legislation. The Government want us to trust them with the powers of Henry VIII when, to be frank, they behave like Charles I.

On the Brexit process, we have had long lectures from Government Members about parliamentary sovereignty, but Ministers have shown in practice that they will deny and defy this House. It is ironic that, just weeks ago, the Brexit Secretary was keen to assure us that no such thing could happen in legislation such as that under discussion. He told the House:

“Secondary legislation is still subject to parliamentary oversight and well established procedures. In no way does it provide unchecked unilateral powers to the Government.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 357.]

Even as he was saying that, his colleagues were refusing to follow those procedures, rejecting parliamentary oversight and using exactly those unchecked, unilateral powers to force higher fees on students.

The Bill will give the Government similar powers. We know that they will use secondary legislation not just for technical details, but to make controversial and important policy decisions by the stroke of a ministerial pen.

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Lady is going on and on, as is her wont, about the Government not giving the Opposition enough time or opportunities to vote against their proposals. There will, however, be a vote tonight on this Bill, so will the Opposition vote for or against it?

Rebecca Long Bailey: I am sorry that I am boring the right hon. Gentleman, but if he listens to the rest of my contribution perhaps his question will be answered at the end. Perhaps that will keep his attention.

The job of a legislature is to legislate. The Bill is effectively a blank cheque handing that job over to Ministers. I hope that the Minister will give an iron-clad guarantee that the Government will not use those powers in that way and an ultimate guarantee to change the Bill itself. Safeguards are vital for our nuclear industry, but they are needed for our parliamentary democracy as well.

The Bill's Henry VIII clauses are particularly worrying, for the simple reason that if the Secretary of State does not use the powers effectively, the UK will simply not have a nuclear safeguarding regime. Our legislation book is scattered with such clauses that have never been enacted, so either the status quo ante prevails or some new primary legislation renders the power irrelevant. That is not the case, however, with the Bill, because if the regime is not fully established into UK law on exit day, it will not work.

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

The point is not only that the Secretary of State “may” introduce such legislation, but that they have to introduce it; otherwise the regime will not work. The Government are, in effect, asking us to trust that they will do the decent thing and make it work, while conceding that the Secretary of State may not, if he or she wishes, actually do it. That certainly does not look very good from the outside looking in, because there is no status quo ante to go back on in the event that the legislation is not properly translated into UK law. We will just fall off a cliff, as we depart from our membership of Euratom.

For all those reasons, it is evident that this barely fit for purpose Bill will, at the very least, need substantial amendment even to make it work on its own terms. Indeed, we also need a wider consideration of how the UK’s advantages and protections under Euratom can successfully be replaced in a national context.

We are clear, however, that, should all else fail, of course we need a nuclear safeguarding regime for the UK post Brexit—[*Interruption.*] I am pleased to get cheers from Government Members. But let me add a caveat: we will need to see evidence of substantial amendment to the procedure set out in the Bill, as well as evidence that the Government are really thinking about the best post-Brexit Euratom formulation, before we can wholeheartedly commit to agreeing to the passage of this Bill on Report and Third Reading.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I say to Members that, if they speak for about eight minutes, everybody will get equal time?

6.16 pm

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about this important Bill, which is the first step to picking up the pieces from our withdrawal from Euratom. I am also grateful for the numerous briefings I have received from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington). He is an extremely assiduous Minister and I cannot go anywhere, least of all the Tea Room, without being stopped by him to be briefed on clause 3(3)(b).

The Secretary of State has already outlined the Bill’s purpose and the benefits we have gained from being members of Euratom, which is, in effect, the single market for the nuclear power industry. It allows us to move nuclear material between member states and, importantly, to move nuclear scientists, many of whom have moved to Culham, live in my constituency and contribute to the leading role that Britain continues to play in nuclear research.

Everyone in this House knows that the Government do not want to leave Euratom. The decision to leave is a case of, “It’s not you, it’s me.” Euratom is collateral damage from Brexit. Clever lawyers—we have not seen the legal advice—have decided that we have to leave Euratom because of the article 50 notice and it is extremely unhelpful, unfortunately, that the European Commission agrees with them; otherwise we might have had a fighting chance of persuading the Government to reverse their decision to withdraw from Euratom. I cannot help

thinking that some such decisions are made slightly on the hoof. I only knew that we were withdrawing from Euratom on the day on which the article 50 Bill was published. It is quite hard to keep up with Government decisions on the issue, so I hope that from now on they will give us a heads up in plenty of time with regard to their decisions as we withdraw.

It is clear that the Bill deserves the House’s support, because it will transfer the safeguarding regime currently undertaken by Euratom to the Office for Nuclear Regulation, in preparation for our withdrawal. It will allow the ONR to monitor fissile material in the UK, to make sure that it is in the right place and being used for the right purpose.

Of course, that is just a small part of Euratom’s work. As Members’ interventions and, indeed, speeches have already highlighted, we need clarity on numerous other areas. The Secretary of State mentioned the very important nuclear co-operation agreements between Euratom and other countries around the world. The agreements allow us to trade in those nuclear markets outside Europe, including Australia, USA, Ukraine and numerous others. Clearly, we will have to replace those nuclear co-operation agreements with those individual states. Indeed, in some of those states, in particular the United States, it is a matter of law that they cannot trade with a country that does not have a nuclear co-operation agreement with them. Clearly, that issue is of the essence.

Secondly, we need—this phrase has been used in many cases with regard to Brexit—to replicate what we already have. In this instance, we need to replicate the common nuclear market that already exists because of our membership of Euratom. That is absolutely vital. Given the transfer of knowledge between highly skilled individuals, I do not think that anyone would object to nuclear specialists being able to move freely between countries and, indeed, to settle in countries where high-powered nuclear research—no pun intended—is being undertaken.

Thirdly, what comes out of our membership of Euratom is our leadership in nuclear research. Culham is a very serious project that has attracted hundreds of millions of pounds of investment through the Joint European Torus project. We were successful in ensuring that the next phase of JET, ITER—the international thermonuclear experimental reactor—will be based in France, despite talk of its being moved to Japan at one point. It is clear that Europe, partly because of the UK’s expertise, maintains its leadership in this regard. Following ITER, there will come another project, DEMO, which will be the first working nuclear fusion power plant: a demonstration plant—the clue is in the name. We were in pole position to get that in the UK, but I very much doubt, regrettably, that that will happen now.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has referred to numerous trips to Vienna—a beautiful city—to talk to the International Atomic Energy Authority. He has hinted that progress has been made on the voluntary offer safeguards agreements—an additional protocol that we will need with the IAEA in future. I look forward to further discussions with him on that. I have already talked about the need for new co-operation agreements with the United States, Australia, Ukraine and others.

The issue of isotopes has been raised. The Government have made it clear that they do not regard isotopes as fissile material that is therefore within the scope of Euratom.

However, I remind my right hon. Friend that there was in the past a crisis in isotope supply. We must remember that we do not create our own isotopes in this country because we do not have the right nuclear reactors, so we have to get them from our European partners. In fact, Euratom was there to step in when that crisis arose. In 2012, when the supply crisis happened, the Euratom Supply Agency specifically extended its remit to cover the supply of isotopes. It would be interesting to know what our relationship with the Euratom Supply Agency will be as we move forward.

I return to Culham and the fusion budget. I am pleased that the Government have made it clear that they will continue to fund Culham until 2020 regardless of whether that money is part of Euratom or otherwise. However, it is again worth pointing out what enormous benefits membership of Euratom has brought to British industry. Some 40 British companies are working on the next project, ITER, with £500 million-worth of contracts. I am sure that they will be maintained, but it would be good to hear reassurances that they will be. I stress that British scientists played a really key role in ensuring that ITER happened in France and not in Japan.

Then there is the question of whether the Office for Nuclear Regulation has the capacity to undertake the responsibilities it will be given in the Bill. As I understand it, eight members of staff at the ONR currently work on safeguarding, and about 40 Euratom staff do so. Incidentally, for those of us in this House who routinely refer to bloated European bureaucracy, I was interested to note that Euratom has only 160 staff, about 25% of whom work on safeguarding. Clearly, some financial support will be needed. The grant from the Government to the ONR is actually going down. Understandably, emphasis has been put on the nuclear industry funding the ONR, but it is a pity that the grant—admittedly it is very small, in the single millions—is being halved at precisely the time when new responsibilities are being put through in statute.

We now understand that the Government's position on Brexit as a whole is to see a transition period. I cannot keep track of how long it will be, and who is in favour of it and who is not. I am in favour of the longest possible transition period—perhaps a couple of hundred years. [*Laughter.*] It would be delightful if we could get from the Minister some indication of whether the Government are thinking about a potential transition period as we leave Euratom so that we can remain members for a couple of years after we formally leave.

We will clearly have to look at associate membership of Euratom. However, nobody should be under any illusions that associate membership is something that we can take off the shelf. Switzerland and Ukraine are already associate members, but for very specific issues, mainly to do with nuclear research; they do not have nearly the same benefits that full Euratom membership brings. Therefore, yet again, we will be seeking a bespoke, special and close relationship with the single nuclear community otherwise known as Euratom.

6.25 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is woefully typical of the approach of this Government that despite their intention to abandon Euratom, this Bill falls significantly short of dealing with vital issues for the UK's nuclear future. Without

any confirmation of a transitional deal, Ministers have left a host of unanswered questions around nuclear safety. The nuclear industry, the medical profession, our research sector and universities—virtually everyone associated with nuclear power or related supply chain industries—have asked for the answers to those questions. Breaking the news to Parliament that we will leave Euratom in a line of the Bill's explanatory notes shows wilful disrespect to them.

It also betrays an all-too-common disregard for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government, because while safety is reserved, areas of regulation are devolved. That regulatory role is just part of why the Scottish Government must be involved in discussions over Euratom as things move forward.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Do we not have to be very careful about our terminology? The Bill has absolutely nothing to do with safety standards as in the prevention of nuclear accidents—it is about safeguarding, which has an altogether different legal meaning. Is it not very important that we do not scaremonger about this?

Drew Hendry: It is very important that the unanswered questions are dealt with in this insufficient Bill—*[Interruption.]* Well, a lot of people will be concerned about the implications of what is not covered in this discussion, some of which I intend to cover.

With regard to nuclear safety, it is critical that we continue membership—or, at the very least, associate membership—of Euratom. Falling back on WTO rules could risk the UK breaking international law. It will come as no surprise that we in the SNP believe that the safest nuclear power policy is no nuclear power. We are determined to deliver just that.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: I am going to make some headway.

In Scotland, we are already showing what can be achieved by renewable energy. New storage solutions for renewables are developing further access to the vast potential from offshore wind and tidal, meaning that an abundance of low-cost, clean energy will be generated. In contrast, this Government continue to chase the folly of new nuclear such as the white elephant that is Hinkley C, leading to exorbitant costs for consumers and leaving yet another burden for future generations to clean up—and that is if there is no more immediate crisis caused by failure or deliberate act leading to nuclear incident. I also wonder what care and attention has been given to people in Wales, as only days ago it came to light that about 300,000 tonnes of “radioactive mud”—a by-product of this Government's nuclear obsession—is to be dredged and moved to Wales. I will leave that to hon. Members from Wales to debate further.

My constituency is in the highlands, which is not only the natural home of much of our renewable generation and its potential, but home to Dounreay. It is a place where the impact and long-term costs, both financial and environmental, of nuclear are well known. Those costs should not be repeated. The Minister pointed out that the responsibility for domestic nuclear safety resides in the UK, but that does not mean that the UK has a good record, especially prior to EU membership.

[Drew Hendry]

Indeed, most of us living in the area can recall the various worrying nuclear material scares, and we are well versed on the dangerous radioactive levels recorded on Caithness beaches.

Each scare should remind us of why our membership of Euratom is so important—because while they can never be perfect, agreed EU directives over safety have been essential in ending some of the hair-raising practices in the UK nuclear industry. Who could forget that in 2006 the remains of actual plutonium rods were found on the beach at Sandside, in Caithness? Hon. Members earlier mentioned watertight provisions, but one retired Dounreay worker who was interviewed at the time spoke of a catalogue of errors, accidents and bad procedure, including claims that workers commonly disposed of radioactive material in the sea at night to avoid it having to appear on official documents. He told a reporter that he once saw a man

“using a Wellington boot tied to a piece of string”

to take test samples

“because the proper equipment had rusted”

beyond use. Mr Lyall, the retired worker who spoke out, had been a plant supervisor for many years.

Although the UK Atomic Energy Authority—as it would—denied that Mr Lyall’s claims were true, it did admit:

“There were practices from the 1950s to the 1960s that we would not repeat today.”

Those practices occurred before we were members of Euratom. In the same statement, the UKAEA told reporters:

“Standards have risen in health and safety and environmental protection, and government legislation has also been tightened considerably.”

Our membership of the EU, and especially of Euratom, has had a positive impact on the improvement of the standards that the UKAEA spoke of. In Scotland, although we are working towards a nuclear-free future, we have to maintain safety at existing facilities during that process, and we must plan for a future of decommissioning.

Robert Neill: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, but is not this the rub? He and I would both prefer to remain in Euratom if we could, but since the legal opinion, not just on this side of the channel but in the Commission, is that we cannot—that has not been challenged by any third party—we need this Bill to achieve exactly the laudable objectives that he and I share.

Drew Hendry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but he highlights the fact that we have not seen that legal opinion or any indication that it is watertight. We should have the opportunity to see it; perhaps it will be forthcoming as a result of this debate.

Mr Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, I am going to make some progress.

As I was saying, in Scotland, although we are working towards a nuclear-free future, we have to maintain safety at existing facilities. The current challenges exist in the

other nations of the UK; indeed, they are multiplied by this Government’s obsession with pursuing costly and dangerous new nuclear. That obsession has put nuclear at the heart of energy strategy, while the Government’s other obsession with hard Brexit would see them leave the very agency that oversees the security of markets, businesses and workers in the sector. To most people looking on, that is baffling and dangerous. To us, it is yet another day in the growing chaos of this Tory Government.

Leaving Euratom serves no purpose other than to put at risk standards that have been in place for many years. Hon. Members do not even need to take my word for it. The Nuclear Industry Association has said:

“The nuclear industry has been clear that our preferred option is to seek to remain part of EURATOM, and that the UK government should negotiate this with the European Commission. The industry in both the UK and Europe want to maintain the same standards as apply now, and have worked well for more than 40 years. Without access to Euratom’s NCAs and common market, the nuclear new build programme, nuclear operations and the decommissioning mission could be seriously affected.”

Everything that can be done must be done to mitigate the risk of any incident, the effects of which would be measured in millennia. Failures in nuclear safety and decommissioning carry a potential catastrophic impact so great that our closest eye and the very best and most up-to-date research are required to avoid such outcomes.

Tom Pursglove: For the very reasons that he has just alluded to, will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether the Scottish National party will support the Bill at 10 o’clock tonight: yes or no?

Drew Hendry: What we would support is a sensible approach to maintaining either full or associate membership of Euratom.

The European regulator oversees nuclear matters as diverse as plutonium storage and medically vital radiotherapy supplies. For example, our membership of the Fusion for Energy programme allows the UK to receive contracts. So far, the UK supply chain has been awarded contracts worth €500 million, and that would have been expected to rise to at least €1 billion. Leaving Euratom seems to serve no purpose other than to satisfy this Government’s hard Brexit mantra.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that there seems to be a rigid consensus among Conservative Members that we cannot stay in Euratom if we leave the EU, and that they refuse to accept that legal opinion on the matter is divided? Does he agree that it is utterly incumbent on the Secretary of State to explore this divided legal opinion to see whether the UK can, indeed, stay in Euratom?

Drew Hendry: I agree that there are clearly unanswered questions about the legal position, which has not been challenged, exercised fully or even debated to any degree. Not only are our safety standards, research opportunities and business at risk, but we may see the most dramatic and negative effects of any withdrawal in the medical field.

Mr Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, I am going to make a bit of progress.

In its paper on radioisotopes and Brexit, the Royal College of Radiologists outlines the crucial role that radioisotopes play in medical advances. The majority of the UK's supply of radioisotopes, used in scanning and the systemic and internal treatment of a wide range of cancers, is imported from Europe and further afield. The most commonly used radioisotope is used in 700,000 medical procedures each year, and global demand is growing by 0.5% a year. Radioisotopes are used for the diagnosis and treatment of various diseases, including cancers, cardiovascular conditions and brain disorders. The UK does not have any reactors capable of producing those isotopes, and because they decay rapidly—often within a matter of hours or days—hospitals in the UK cannot stockpile them and must rely on a continuous supply from reactors in the EU.

Mike Wood: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the isotopes he refers to are not special fissile nuclear material, and so they are not regulated by international safeguards such as these and would not be affected if we left Euratom?

Drew Hendry: It is telling that Conservative Members are willing to ignore all advice from experts in the nuclear industry in order to uphold their position that we must have the hardest possible Brexit.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, I am going to make some progress.

As I have said, the UK does not currently have any reactors capable of producing such isotopes.

Greg Clark: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. Euratom places no restrictions whatsoever on the export of medical isotopes, and so there are no further protections needed. It is irrelevant.

Drew Hendry: I do not think that the Minister is reflecting the view of the experts in the industry who are affected, and I will come on to underline that with some quotes.

Euratom supports the secure and safe supply and use of medical radioisotopes. If and when the UK withdraws, it will no longer—this is the critical point—have access to Euratom's support, ending the certainty of a seamless and continuing supply. The Royal College of Radiologists points out that the supply of radioisotopes would be disrupted by leaving the single market, because transport delays will reduce the amount of useful radioisotopes that can be successfully transported to their destination.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, I am going to make some progress. As I pointed out, radioisotopes decay within hours or days of production. The most common isotope has a half-life of just 66 hours. The consequences of a disrupted radioisotope supply was made clear not only during the incident that the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) mentioned, but during the channel tunnel fire in 2008. That led to a reduction of the availability of radioisotopes, and to cancelled procedures. So, for patients,

there can be no no-deal scenario. Such a scenario is a ludicrous proposition with regard to leaving the EU; as practitioners point out, however, in relation to medical isotopes it is a matter of people's very lives.

Leaving Euratom will increase the difficulty of maintaining nuclear fuel in the longer term and threaten research funding into medical isotopes.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Drew Hendry: No, because I am going to conclude.

Most concerning of all is that leaving Euratom has the potential to reduce standards of protection for workers and the public. Since the UK Government have committed to a nuclear future, it would be pushing their irresponsible actions to critical levels if they were to forsake membership or, at the very least, associate membership of Euratom. Until there is no nuclear in Scotland—on our land, or in our waters—we should have the right to remain a member of it.

6.40 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is abundantly clear, especially from the Westminster Hall debate secured by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), that Euratom is intrinsically entwined with our membership of the European Union. Legal advice says that, as does the Commission itself. That has been abundantly expressed during this debate, and no doubt it will be expressed again on many other occasions.

The tone of the Westminster Hall debate, and the contribution it made, was fantastic. Unfortunately, some aspects of the issue, as we have heard today, are actually a little more disturbing. The way the debate is going on medical isotopes—radioactive isotopes for cancer and other medical treatments—has been extraordinary, given that it is absolutely clear that this does not form part of the Bill. The impact of leaving Euratom will not be to stop people receiving such cancer treatments.

Albert Owen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for referring to the debate I led on 12 July. There was consensus in that debate in the Grand Committee Room that we should have associate membership of Euratom. That was the general theme of what was said by Members from both sides of the House, and we need to move towards it. In particular, I do not think that the Bill provides the lifeboat necessary for us to leave Euratom. Many of us are arguing for a transition period so that we will remain in Euratom until we get either associate membership or third-party agreements.

Chris Green: I appreciate the broad consensus in the Grand Committee Room, but not everyone had an opportunity to speak in that debate. No doubt there will be a transition period of some sort, but whether we have an associate membership or just a very close association at the end of it—like the association we will have with the European Union—we will look at what the EU does and how it goes about things, and we of course want similar standards. We are not looking to leave the European Union and then to reduce and cut all kinds of standards.

Drew Hendry: Will the hon. Gentleman advise us what kind of transition he would propose?

Chris Green: We are very early on in the negotiations, and I am sure the Minister for Climate Change and Industry and the Department for Exiting the European Union will look at that.

The extraordinary aspect of this debate is that some people are saying we will go off a cliff edge and valuable radioactive isotopes will no longer be available. What does that suggest about our friends in the European Union—that they will no longer sell these products, or that they will choose not to allow those products to be sent over to the United Kingdom? It is extraordinary to suggest that such sales will cease.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that is not about the EU wanting to give us radioisotopes, but about half-lives? The radioisotopes we are talking about have extremely short half-lives, so any delay at all at the border means fewer patients will be able to benefit from them.

Chris Green: Yes, I understand that some half-lives can be as short as six hours, so the efficacy of the isotopes will diminish in an incredibly short period. However, to say that the European Union and the British Government are not fully aware of that and that getting such materials from Europe over to the United Kingdom cannot or will not happen is extraordinary.

Alan Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Patricia Gibson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Green: I have already given way on this issue.

It is absolutely extraordinary to suggest that these materials will dry up overnight. Clearly, we are going to have a good relationship with the European Union and there are going to be sales of these products.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that implying that the Bill will have an impact on the supply of medical isotopes is shameful scaremongering that could deeply upset and distress seriously ill people in this country?

Chris Green: Absolutely. I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. As has been highlighted, 500 medical procedures a year, involving 10,000 people in the United Kingdom, depend on these products, yet we hear that they are going to be withdrawn and taken away, or that they will be held at the ports.

Rachel Reeves: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Green: No, I have already given way.

That is an extraordinary thing to suggest, and since this is outside the scope of the Bill, it is clearly scaremongering.

Rachel Reeves: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Chris Green: No. I am going to make some progress.

As we leave the European Union, we want to continue research relationships with it on many projects. We will see through Horizon 2020 to the end, and we must consider what kind of relationship we will have on the

successor programme—framework programme 9. We need a close relationship with the European Union on Horizon 2020, but we must also consider what relationship we need or want on framework programme 9, and we must be mindful of the direction of travel with the European Union.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the period beyond 2020. All things being equal, this Parliament, being a fixed-term Parliament, will last until 2022. Should the Government not already be signalling how much money they will put towards future funding?

Chris Green: There will be an ongoing consultation on the relationship the university and scientific sector in the United Kingdom wants on the successor programme. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know, Horizon 2020 really focuses on top-end research—the things that we often do very well in the United Kingdom—which is why this country has a disproportionately large share of the Horizon 2020 money. On the successor programme, however, the moneys may be directed towards capacity building, which would favour other regions of the European Union more and the United Kingdom less. We must look into that and watch the direction of travel in the European Union. This is not set in stone, and we should not think that the successor programme to Horizon 2020 will merely “cut and paste” what we have today.

My big concern about where we go from here, post-Brexit, is the migration to the United Kingdom of European Union citizens and people from across the world who want to take up jobs in the nuclear industry. There is a huge opportunity in this, post-Brexit, for trained and qualified staff who currently work in Euratom to come across and work in the United Kingdom or for us to recruit and bring in people from across the world. Once we leave the European Union, we will have an opportunity to set the skill requirements we need in this country.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making some interesting points. I have consulted the powers that be in my constituency, where I have two universities, and there is concern about the consequences for science of ending the free movement of labour, certainly in relation to the specialists who come in to help train people. Experts very often come from Europe to teach science and technology, and there is concern because if we do not get this right, those people may well not be available for those universities.

Chris Green: That is a fair point, and why we have to ensure that we have as close a relationship as possible, consistent with having left, with the European Union post Brexit. Universities will be one of the prime sectors that the Government look to to ensure that we have that co-operation. It is such an important sector for the UK.

When thinking about who we need in the UK, people often focus on the highly qualified—professors, lecturers and so on—and the technicians that universities need can be overlooked. They are often paid significantly less, but we need them to come over, too.

Finally, will the Minister comment in the winding-up speech about arrangements for co-operation with countries outside the EU, such as the United States and Canada?

6.50 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I do not think that anybody debated or considered leaving Euratom, or voted to leave it on 23 June 2016—

Kit Malthouse: I did.

Rachel Reeves: Except the hon. Gentleman. However, we are where we are, and the Government have made their decision. I urge them not to abandon what I and many hon. Members regard as a sensible approach: to pursue a transition period during which we stay under Euratom's auspices, and then seek some sort of associate membership so that we do not have to recreate everything that the Minister and others have said that we value from our membership.

I understand the need for the Bill. There is a risk that we could crash out of the EU and Euratom, and we need a back-up, given that the Office for Nuclear Regulation will take on the responsibilities that Euratom has today. Unlike trade, there is no fall-back option for nuclear. With trade, we have the World Trade Organisation, but with nuclear, if we do not have an arrangement with the IAEA, we will not be able to trade or move nuclear materials around the EU. The Bill is an important belt-and-braces measure in case we crash out, which I hope does not happen, but is a risk.

The Bill does part of one thing—pass the remit for safeguarding inspections from Euratom to our regulator, the ONR. As hon. Members know, the ONR is not new, but there are serious pressures on its capacity. It is currently recruiting a new chief nuclear inspector, and only last week the Government had to put aside more money for it as part of the clean growth strategy. We therefore know that the ONR is under pressure even before taking on the new responsibilities that the Government may pass on to it. As a senior ONR official was forced to admit to a Select Committee in the other place, the timescale for adding safeguarding responsibilities is “very challenging”.

Albert Owen: My hon. Friend is making an important point about the ONR's resources. Indeed, it takes about seven years to train the experts to ensure that they are competent enough to do the work. The lack of resources means that we really need a transitional period.

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge. He led the Westminster Hall debate and has a constituency interest. He is absolutely right, and some of the questions I will pose later are about how we can be sure that the ONR has the capacity and the capability to take on the responsibility that the Government will pass on to it.

The Bill does not resolve all the safeguarding issues. It does not solve the difficulties associated with the common nuclear market that exists as part of the Euratom framework, and it does not put in place the nuclear co-operation agreements with other countries that we would require to enable trading and even the exchange of information between nuclear states. It does nothing to resolve the arrangements to continue the world-leading fusion research, funded by Euratom but located in Oxfordshire, as the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) pointed out. I know that Members who represent those communities have real concerns about

the impact. When I visited Culham a couple of weeks ago, it was made clear to me that those working there would prefer to stay in Euratom and had serious concerns about our exit.

Despite what some hon. Members think and say, the Bill does not provide the assurance that radiographers and others have sought for months from the Government that medical radioisotopes, again not made here, can be seamlessly transported to the UK for diagnostics and treatment. No one in this Chamber can say with certainty what will happen in March 2019, and whether agreements will be put in place for the frictionless movement of goods and services. Without that, we cannot be certain that those radioisotopes can come into this country easily and without hindrance.

Given that list, it should not be a surprise to Ministers or the House that my Committee—the Select Committee on Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—has launched an inquiry into the impact of the Government's decision to leave Euratom. The House will also not be surprised to learn that a lot of detailed and concerning evidence has been submitted to us. As well as my visit to Culham and the Joint European Torus—JET—I was at Hinkley Point today, meeting representatives from Hinkley Point C. Again, concerns were expressed to us about ensuring that nuclear fuel can get into the country once we have left Euratom. Ministers should be mindful of that.

Let us be clear: the process of ceasing to be part of Euratom, if that is what we end up doing, is complex, time consuming, and relies on good will, negotiation and agreement with third parties. Ministers cannot simply say that we will get those arrangements—they are up for negotiation. The Bill is just one small part of that complex picture, and as Ministers know, there is a very limited timeframe to get a series of agreements with a range of third party states to replicate what already exists as part of the Euratom framework.

My biggest concern about the Bill as it stands is that although it provides for permission to transfer the responsibility for safeguarding, it leaves to a later date all the arrangements that need to be made to ensure that the ONR can carry out those new functions. It leaves it to Ministers to determine them, at an undetermined time—increasingly a feature of the Government's attitude to this as well as other aspects of the process of disentangling the UK from the EU. That is worrying, and should concern every Member of this House. Parliament should be involved because the decisions made here will affect all our constituents.

If we consent to the Bill as it stands, and transfer authority from Euratom to the ONR, it is important that we are confident in the arrangements to effect that change. We must be confident that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said, the ONR has enough qualified and relevantly experienced personnel, because this is a specialist and skilled task, to do the job. Given that it is currently done and has been done for decades by another organisation, we must be confident that those people have had the right training, that the equipment required for monitoring special fissile material—by inspection in person and remotely—is in place, and that we know that the IAEA, the international body responsible for safeguarding standards, is satisfied and confident that this can be done effectively.

[Rachel Reeves]

However collegiate or conciliatory Ministers are during the Bill's passage, and I know that they will be, they cannot provide those assurances to Parliament today, or any time soon, and they have no way of knowing whether the conditions will be met. It is a very big gamble, and frankly, it is unacceptable to say, "Don't worry, it will all happen through regulation and we will deal with it later; we have a very good relationship". It is Ministers' and the Government's responsibility to provide Parliament with the assurances, detailed information and confidence on this matter, and all those aspects of replicating what we currently benefit from as part of Euratom.

In the context of the Bill and what needs to happen in addition to it, there are several questions that need answers before Members can be convinced that the Government's course of action—their choice that we go our own way rather than negotiate for a transition period and associate membership—is correct. When can Ministers tell the House more about the terms of any agreement with the IAEA? It has been suggested that standards will be broadly equivalent to those from which we benefit now. What does "broadly equivalent" mean? What is the difference between what we currently have and what the Government are seeking to get from the IAEA? When will the voluntary offer be agreed, ratified and confirmed by the IAEA? What measures do the Government have in mind to ensure that the Office for Nuclear Regulation has the right skills and resources in place, given how long it takes to train a nuclear safeguards inspector and the skills shortages that already exist in the sector?

The Minister knows well that many experts in the field are concerned about the decision to leave Euratom. Since its inception, Euratom has helped to facilitate trade, promoted key research and development programmes, allowed for the movement of skills and maintained high safeguarding standards. While nobody in this House would demur from the absolute requirement that safeguarding inspections happen, or from the need for the ONR to have powers from this House if it is to undertake that role, the Minister must realise too that, notwithstanding that position, many questions remain unanswered. I hope a better way forward can be found—transition and associate membership, not a risky and costly process of transferring powers to the ONR for something that by its very nature relies on international co-operation, agreement and trust.

7 pm

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I am grateful and very pleased to be here as the first brick is placed into the strong foundation that we will be building for a post-Brexit Britain. This is the first real piece of legislation enabling us to see what it will look like. I congratulate the Minister on the Bill's brevity and concision. Hopefully that pattern will be repeated.

I welcome the Bill and indeed our leaving Euratom, as I said earlier, although I recognise that many will not. Warm has been the embrace of Euratom for the past 40-odd years. Much has been achieved, in both research and safeguarding standards, but in truth the mourning bell has been tolling for Euratom for some time, because it is clear that the EU is turning its face against civil nuclear power. Germany is phasing it out by 2020, in a

decision taken a couple of years ago, while Belgium, in a decision taken by our friend Mr Verhofstadt when he was Prime Minister, has decided to phase it out by 2025. Italy and Denmark have already made nuclear power generation illegal. Greece and Spain are phasing it out. Austria—ironically, as the home of the IAEA—has made it illegal even to transport nuclear material across its territory, such is its antipathy to it.

Given that the aggressively anti-nuclear Green party peppers Parliaments across the continent and has 51 seats in the European Parliament, serious questions need to be asked about the future of Euratom and its funding. When we recognise that much of the Horizon 2020 funding, which will go towards nuclear research, is generated by Germany, which will not be using the technology invented under that programme, we have to ask how long Germany will tolerate the notion that it should be pouring hundreds of millions of euros into nuclear research.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): My hon. Friend clearly knows a lot about this subject, so on a point of information to illuminate the House, what does he think about the French attitude to nuclear power?

Kit Malthouse: As I was about to say, in truth, Euratom is the French. It is anchored around France, with its 58 reactors, and they are the only serious nuclear player among the EU 27. The UK is second and Ukraine, although not a member—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) pointed out, it is now a special associate of Euratom, as it were—is third. Nevertheless, we now have the opportunity to look strategically at where our civil nuclear is going, what global alliances we should have, the direction of Euratom and EU nuclear research, and whether there is a better way.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the future of nuclear is still very uncertain? If the Romans had invented nuclear power, we would still be guarding our nuclear waste sites.

Kit Malthouse: I absolutely think that nuclear waste is important, particularly to us in this country. That is why we should have total control of it ourselves and not be reliant on a series of countries that will perhaps not even be willing to put money into researching how to dispose of, or reprocess or otherwise use nuclear waste.

We have been members of the IAEA since 1957. We have the capability to make the change; indeed, there is a strategic argument that the Office for Nuclear Regulation would be much better served if it had responsibility for all three of the civil nuclear strands—safety, security, and regulation and safeguarding. We lead the world in safety regulation; we can lead the world in the other two.

Mr Vaizey: I am immensely enjoying my hon. Friend's speech, not least as I have discovered that the one person in the country who went to the polls on 23 June specifically to get us out of Euratom also happens to be a Member of this House. It is a remarkable coincidence. If I may probe his argument, does it not have a weakness, in that if he is saying that so many members of the EU want to undermine civil nuclear power, is this not precisely the wrong time for the Brits to leave the French to themselves? Does he also agree that, regardless of his attitude to Euratom, we will still have to go through an incredible number of hoops to recreate what we have benefited from?

Kit Malthouse: No, I completely disagree with my right hon. Friend. This is not the wrong time; it is exactly the right time for us to recognise that there is a world beyond the EU in terms of nuclear research. There has been much angst in the House already about nuclear scientists being able to travel freely, but I would point out that they do actually exist outside the European Union. There are lots of them in Japan, Korea, China and elsewhere. Indeed, the leading edge of nuclear research and the development of civil nuclear power is elsewhere. As I have said, we are dealing with a community of countries that are turning their back on this technology. Even if we get to the holy grail of fission, and we manage to get fusion going from the great reactor in my right hon. Friend's constituency, the Germans will not use it. They have said already that it is of no use to them. The idea that they will continue to fund it into the future is fallacious.

Mr Vaizey: I am always further intrigued by the arguments of people such as my hon. Friend, who imply that we could do nothing outside Europe when we were members of Euratom. However, we got the Chinese to invest in Hinkley while remaining members. How did our membership prevent us from co-operating with other nuclear states?

Kit Malthouse: It has not prevented us, but we now have the opportunity to recognise that the nuclear community is global. While Euratom has served its purpose thus far, the point I am trying to make is that the trend of European opinion is very much against nuclear, so those countries are unlikely to continue pumping the money into Euratom that it has hitherto enjoyed. That is why we need to look elsewhere. It is perfectly possible for us to have a bilateral relationship with France. We have one on nuclear defence at the moment, which was signed in 2010; we can do the same on power. There is absolutely no threat to our participation in some of the global research programmes, such as the one at Culham and the ITER in the south of France, which currently includes Korea, China, Japan and Russia. There are lots of ways in which we can be involved.

My message today, I guess, is that people have to learn that Euratom cannot be part of project fear. It must not be part of project fear; it is far too strategically important to us not to reach out to the rest of the world. I am quite happy for us to have an associate membership, if that is what is required, but there is a world beyond the EU, and we have seen that in medical isotopes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) said, no one is pretending that we will not be sent medical isotopes when we come out, but that points to a strategic problem because of our membership of Euratom: we should be manufacturing those isotopes here. Why have we not got a reactor that will create them? We have the largest agglomeration of life sciences research on the planet, yet we do not have this feather in our cap—this piece of the jigsaw. Notwithstanding the SNP's antipathy to nuclear, perhaps we should build that kind of reactor in Scotland, given that thousands and thousands of Scots benefit from medical isotopes every year.

The argument about Euratom has exposed the strategic nature of nuclear to us, in defence, civil nuclear and medical, and allows us now to think more coherently

about which way we go. Civil nuclear is an international effort. Regulation should be at international level, as should partnership, so that we can finally find the holy grail of fusion power, which will solve our power generation problems well into the next century.

7.9 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"]—because he at least made an argument, unlike some previous Conservative Members, whose speeches were filled with vapid nonsense about how everything would be wonderful. His argument, however, was essentially: the Germans are coming and we need to pull up the nuclear drawbridge.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend's precise point was that the Germans had retreated and left the field of civil nuclear energy. So the hon. Gentleman has drawn exactly the wrong conclusion.

John Woodcock: I tried to listen carefully.

I have some sympathy with Ministers. I am reminded of Dora Gaitskell in 1961 when she turned to her husband Hugh, that great leader of the Labour party—

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Those were the days.

John Woodcock: Don't tempt me!

Hugh Gaitskell had just turned on its head his previously strong support for the EU by saying that joining Euratom would be like reversing 1,000 years of Britain as an independent state, and Dora said to her husband, "All the wrong people are cheering". The Minister has had enthusiastic endorsements not only from the hon. Member for North West Hampshire, who belongs to the new generation of hard Brexiteer, but from the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who I saw leaping to his feet enthusiastically, and others. He needs to look around at who his friends are on this and push much harder for the view that we might speculate is his own personal view—that the course the Government have set is potentially deeply damaging for the nation, for civil nuclear power and, as I will come to, for many workers in my constituency and far more in that of the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison).

The Bill is a hastily constructed life raft. Labour Members are not against life rafts—some of us have of late considered them in other circumstances. They might sometimes be necessary, and we will engage constructively in Committee to improve this hastily and poorly constructed life raft, but we should not be seeking to bail from the nuclear ship at all, as is currently the Government's policy. I asked the Secretary of State two important questions—he was generous in allowing me to intervene on him twice—but to my mind he answered neither. The Minister might do so now or in his summing up if he wishes. First, is it the Government's policy to negotiate a transition agreement beyond 2019, so that the cliff edge we are currently facing recedes at least by a few years? Secondly, are the Government seeking associate membership, which would negate the need for a whole new set of nuclear co-operation agreements?

[John Woodcock]

I know that Ministers are inclined to put on a brave face, but still I must note the level of optimism coming from the Dispatch Box. The Minister will know better than me that the civil service is bursting at the seams trying to deliver the panoply of new treaties and arrangements that Brexit is forcing on the country. It is at best highly doubtful that there will be the capacity in the system at our end to put together a whole new set of comprehensive NCAs to alleviate the problem by 2019, and that puts at risk not only the current generation of civil nuclear power stations but the future generation.

Since the Minister took up his job, he has been engaged privately, like his predecessors, in trying to rescue the NuGen deal, which, if it goes ahead, will create up to 20,000 jobs in Copeland's local economy. Several hundred of my constituents already go up the road and coast every day to work at Sellafield. We are talking about thousands more jobs, but that deal has potentially been damaged by the uncertainty around the post-Brexit arrangements—not only the final outcome but the Government's intentions now. That uncertainty might deter this vital new investor, which can keep those 20,000 jobs on track in our local economy and help the UK to keep the lights on.

The situation is deeply worrying. I realise that many current and future Ministers will not have wanted to be in this situation, but they have some agency and could be clearer with the nuclear industry and other nations watching about where exactly they want to end up. That is the responsible way to safeguard jobs in our local area.

7.16 pm

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), with whom I share a passion for nuclear energy.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in an important debate that is crucial for my constituency. Fellow Members will have heard me speak previously of the world-class nuclear skills in my constituency, of its internationally celebrated safe ways of working and of the challenges my community is overcoming in dealing with the world's most complex nuclear legacy clean-up. Sellafield and the supply chain are world leading in this field. Sellafield is Europe's biggest and most complex nuclear site and has been central to the UK's nuclear development right from the beginning.

The UK established the world's first civil nuclear programme, with the opening the first nuclear power station in my constituency at Calder Hall, which was first connected to the grid in 1956 and officially opened by the Queen. It was the world's first power station to generate electricity on a commercial scale and operated for 47 years until it closed in 2003. The International Atomic Energy Agency was formed in March 1957 to support civil nuclear collaboration across the globe, and again we were world leaders in its formation. It is critical that we continue to benefit from being part of the IAEA and Euratom after we leave the EU.

Since being elected in February, I have visited both of Copeland's nuclear licensed sites, Sellafield and the Low Level Waste Repository, to see for myself the incredible work done there by humble but highly skilled

workers—scientists, engineers, tradespeople, those working in quality assurance and the enormous support operations. Sellafield has changed considerably since I worked there 20 years ago. I should declare an interest, as my husband, father and brother all work at Sellafield or in the nuclear industry—but then so do more than half my constituents, either directly or indirectly.

I have visited over 70 of the nuclear supply chain companies operating in my constituency. From global household names such as AECOM, Arup, Atkins and Ansaldo NES to the more bespoke, locally grown, niche businesses of Delkia and REACT Engineering. We have an incredible wealth of talent and capability, matched by enormous opportunity, but each of these businesses is wholly dependent on the Government getting this right. Even to make a phone call between countries depends on getting this right. For an engineer in Copeland to speak with a supplier in Savannah River requires bilateral agreements. With Hinkley Point C in mid-construction and a raft of nuclear new build on the horizon, including Moorside adjacent to Sellafield, all the more urgency and precision is required in maintaining the benefits we currently enjoy through our membership of Euratom.

As we leave the European Union, the Bill is a much-needed step that will potentially give the Office for Nuclear Regulation the necessary powers to take up and continue the role that about 40 Euratom officials currently undertake, if that is required. I understand that there may well be a potential for the United Kingdom to remain part of Euratom, or to become an associate member if an agreement can be reached that is mutually beneficial and suits the UK. Switzerland and the UK show that there is a precedent, but a deal of this kind must be right for the UK's interests. However, it is essential to have a plan B, which is what the Bill provides.

The Bill seeks to transfer the responsibility for safeguarding inspections from Euratom to the ONR. It is important to note that Euratom currently has no impact on the management and safety of the UK's many nuclear sites, which are solely the responsibility of the ONR, guided by UK policy. Of course, our policies reflect agreed international standards, and our standards are extremely high. There is no reason, in my opinion, that a similar set-up could not exist in respect of Euratom. The UK has a robust and well-established civil nuclear safety regime, which will not change if all the necessary steps are taken to ensure confidence and continuity throughout the transition stage.

The Government's decision to withdraw from Euratom is a key concern for many businesses in my constituency and for those working in the nuclear industry throughout the UK. We need to ensure that, if we must leave Euratom, we have bilateral agreements beyond the EU. Foreign investment and knowledge are fundamental to the continued use and development of modern nuclear power plants. We need only look at Hinkley Point C to see an example of international knowledge and skill-sharing and, of course, an example of foreign investment. Any investor or developer requires confidence and continuity, particularly when the stakes are high. As a member of Euratom, the UK enjoys the benefits of several nuclear co-operation agreements, negotiated by Euratom on behalf of its member states. Trade agreements with many countries including Japan, South Africa and the

USA allow the sharing of knowledge, personnel and components. We must not allow ourselves to lose that international co-operation.

Although the Bill is a good and necessary first step, even as a precautionary measure, more needs to be done to address and replicate the other aspects of Euratom, and to determine how we can ensure continuity in all the areas for which Euratom membership currently provides. While the transfer of responsibility from Euratom to the ONR seems logical, it is essential to ensure that the ONR has the necessary budget and is able to recruit appropriately skilled staff within the required timescales. I remain concerned about the Government's intention to reduce the grant for the ONR. I fear that that would have a serious impact on the organisation's ability to complete its current tasks, let alone perform its increased duties after Euratom withdrawal. That needs to be addressed.

I commend the work of the Minister and his Department. They have been very generous with their time when dealing with concerned Members such as me. The Department has obviously noted the difficulty, and the importance, of ensuring that there is a smooth transition if membership, or associate membership, of Euratom is not possible. Let me also recognise the work of the Prospect union and the Nuclear Industry Association in helping their members, and me, to understand the needs of the industry, and that of the many businesses who have contributed their concerns and suggestions in their efforts to get this right.

I must make it clear that not getting this transition right—not putting the right arrangements in place and doing so in time—would be catastrophic, in many ways, for my constituency, for the nuclear sector, for research and development, for science, industry and advanced manufacturing, for apprenticeships and our legacy of world-class skills, for jobs, for growth and for keeping our country powered up. It would be catastrophic for our country and for other countries, too. I know—this is just one example—that the skills, experience and innovative equipment of Copeland's businesses are a vital part of the clean-up operation at Fukushima in Japan.

For decades, the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield has processed waste from other countries, safely and efficiently. THORP is generating about £1 billion annually for the UK. The processes of separation, encapsulation, vitrification and compaction to deal with complex decommissioning challenges have been perfected at Sellafield, at the Low Level Waste Repository and throughout our supply chain, and the time is right for exporting more of those skills, the knowledge of processes and the innovation of equipment. Our future is and should be bright if we get this right, but everything depends on appropriate and timely arrangements.

Let me end on a note of caution. Like other Members who appreciate the importance of this industry to our country, I will not accept being pushed off our pedestal of internationally respected nuclear excellence. Without the replacement provisions in place, if we have to leave Euratom, we will fall not only from that pedestal, but right off the cliff in March 2019. The Bill is therefore vital, if only as a plan B. I am pleased to have been able to speak in the debate and to commend the beginning of the process. Negotiations and agreements must be made swiftly, with rigour and robustness, and with the support and agreement of Members on both sides of the House.

7.25 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): As many Members have already pointed out, the Bill should not be needed at all. The most sensible approach to nuclear safeguarding would be for the United Kingdom to remain a member of Euratom, rather than wasting vast amounts of time and money in setting up an alternative regime that the Government admit will be as much a replica of the original as possible. The Government have created a rod for their own back by insisting that the European Court of Justice and freedom of movement are red lines. I wish they would just admit that that is the problem, rather than hiding behind legalese and unpublished, disputed advice.

As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), when most people voted on 23 June 2016, the vast majority did not even know what Euratom was, let alone how to pronounce it. It remains possible that Britain could have taken the option of remaining a member, and it is a political choice to withdraw from it before that has been absolutely set as the legal position. What I am sure of is that the fallout—pun absolutely intended—of this decision leaves a huge gap not only in the country's ability to safeguard nuclear material, but in many other areas not covered by the Bill.

We are told that the Government will seek a new treaty to replace Euratom, so the Bill is applicable only in the event of Britain's crashing out of the EU and Euratom with no deal. No deal would be deeply disastrous for Britain, and the Government should not even be considering that option; yet here we are, about to pass a Bill to authorise spending on just that eventuality. Let us give credit where it is due. Given the importance of this issue and the Government's own lack of confidence in themselves, the Department is doing absolutely the right thing in preparing for the worst—and yes, the Liberal Democrats would vote for the Bill on Second Reading. However, the fact that the Government have produced the Bill so early in the Brexit process shows that they must be genuinely concerned by the complexity of the task ahead and the possibility that the negotiations will fail.

By the way, as we all know, we have not even started those negotiations, and industry experts tell us that it could take up to seven years to negotiate a treaty as wide-ranging as Euratom. Although I have enjoyed listening to the jolly assurances of some Conservative Members—I, too, am an optimist by nature—I fail to see how we are going to do this in time.

Like many other Members who have spoken today, I am gravely concerned about the limited scope of the Bill and the fact that it does not cover the full range of Euratom functions. In particular, I am worried for my constituents. At one time, Abingdon had the highest number of PhDs per square kilometre in Europe, and many of the scientists still work on the Joint European Torus—JET—in Culham. The United Kingdom is world-leading in that area. Fusion technology, if achieved at scale, would be tantamount in technological terms to putting a man on a the moon—it is that revolutionary—and it would be a criminal act to put that position in jeopardy, but that is exactly what we are doing. To ensure its future, we need guarantees about the next phase of the work programme by the middle of next year, months before the Brexit negotiations are completed. This is very urgent.

[Layla Moran]

This is not just about money, as we will, I am sure, be told: to fully participate, we must ensure that these scientists can move freely and collaborate fully and, furthermore, that those already here are enticed to stay. These are the best minds in the world, and I need not remind the Government how rare they are. It is all very well saying that we want them to stay, but we need to give them more certainty than that; they are already leaving.

My constituents, alongside others in the industry, are extremely concerned about the implications of Government decisions on their futures. What kind of associate membership do we want? Will the Minister publish, and consult on, proposals for dispute resolution? Will he guarantee freedom of movement of specialist and technical staff in the nuclear industry? There is far more information that we need from the Minister about these and other areas, and it is worrying that this Bill is so limited in scope.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Is the hon. Lady seriously suggesting that there would be any circumstances in which well-qualified nuclear professionals would be prevented from coming into this country? Does she think, plausibly, that that is an outcome we might get to?

Layla Moran: I absolutely do, because we have not had that absolute cast-iron guarantee. I should add that this is not just about the nuclear scientists; it is also about all the support staff who are needed.

John Woodcock: My concern is that, as we know, world-class nuclear scientists are a rare and valued commodity, and some nations might not see it as in their interests to open the doors and allow greater exits of people whom they want to keep. It suggests a potentially slightly naive view of the world to think that everyone will just say, “Yes, go to Britain; it will all be fine.”

I will be brief about this, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I forgot in my speech to ask for the leave of the House: unfortunately, a family illness means that I am not going to be present for the wind-ups—but in any case Labour does not seem to be voting against.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I let the hon. Gentleman make a long intervention when I realised that there was a point that he wanted to make. I just want to make the point that this does not create a precedent for long interventions, as it was a special case.

Layla Moran: On funding, the haste with which the Bill has been introduced suggests the Minister wishes to move forward quickly with recruiting and training the nuclear specialists who will be absolutely crucial in the case of no deal, and rightly so for the reasons I have just described, but can he confirm how much he anticipates being spent on implementing these measures and exactly when this spending will begin? Also, how do we know it will be a sufficient sum? The explanatory notes talk about a new IT system; I look forward to scrutinising that in the Public Accounts Committee.

Another concern is the extent to which specifics are being left to regulations, as has been said, rather than written into the Bill. We are starting to get used to that in this House, but that does not mean it is right: it reduces the level of scrutiny over Government decisions and it erodes public trust.

Given that the Minister has said that he wants associate membership of Euratom, but that formal negotiations might currently not take place, will he publish a policy statement on associate status to enable the industry to start to work around such arrangements as they might progress? Also, will these be Ukraine-style, or Switzerland-style—or, as we have heard from the Minister before, will they be even better? Without oversight of the European Court of Justice and with no freedom of movement, I am not sure we are going to achieve even that. I want to share the Minister’s degree of optimism, but I learned in my physics degree that scepticism is also a valuable approach to life.

What about transition? Have the Government given up on that idea, or will transition include continued membership of Euratom? We have heard already how wide-ranging the Euratom treaty is; I suggest that we must decouple the Euratom issue from the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill completely and stop any talk of a cliff-edge on Euratom issues once and for all.

What if this does go all wrong, however? Are the Government even considering that? If Government negotiations fail and we crash out of the EU without negotiating a new agreement with Euratom, we will need this legislation, but we will also need so much more. We keep hearing that it is going to be fine. I feel ever more that this House is being drawn into a scene from “Dr Strangelove”: “How Parliament learned to stop worrying and love Brexit.” Our relationship with Euratom is far too important to take a risk like that.

7.35 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), who confirmed that the Liberal Democrats will support the Bill tonight. Indeed, all Members worried about the possibility of the UK falling off a cliff-edge without future arrangements as a result of leaving the EU should support this Bill. It is an important step to avoiding that situation, and this plan B is precisely why the Nuclear Industry Association has described it as “a necessary legislative step.”

It is therefore not a little ironic that the party that wants to have nothing to do with nuclear power, is presumably worried about safeguards, and cannot make a speech without chanting the words “Hard Tory Brexit” appears to be against a contingency plan to prevent precisely that wild accusation from coming true for the nuclear sector. The points made against this Bill by the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), and, indeed, by the Labour party spokesman, the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), cannot therefore be about a lack of preparation for any possibility of disagreement about sensible third-party status with Euratom being secured by negotiation, and it must be clear that anyone voting against the Bill tonight will, indeed, be voting for a very hard Brexit for nuclear energy.

The truth is that we must leave to one side the bizarre positions adopted by the formal two leading Opposition parties, and focus on the Bill itself and the comments of individual Members of Parliament, including the hon. Members for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) and for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), and my party colleagues, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who has worked in the nuclear industry.

This is a contingency Bill. We all want a form of associative membership with Euratom that replicates existing arrangements. That is the clear position of the entire sector, represented either by the NIA or EDF Energy, the operator of all our existing nuclear power stations, with its operational headquarters in Barnwood in my constituency. It is telling that EDF Energy has said, first, that it appreciates the Government's "early and constructive engagement on this issue with us", and, secondly—to deal with some elements of scaremongering—that the UK has extremely "robust" arrangements for safety and security, and, "whatever the status of our membership of Euratom, there is no question but that this will continue to be the case."

The NIA calls this Bill a welcome first step, but it does raise some questions, and I would be grateful if the Minister, in winding up, responded to some of the following questions. First, will he confirm that a bilateral US-UK nuclear co-operation agreement would be put in place to secure US components for Sizewell B in the event of Euratom's NCAs and common market not being available to us, presumably through a voluntary offer safeguards agreement with the IAEA? Secondly, will he confirm that our funding for the Joint European Torus—or JET—project, which continues to 2020, will be extended, assuming there is a new relationship with Euratom? Thirdly, will he clarify the contingency process for the movement of nuclear material, goods, people, information and services to be agreed with the Euratom Supply Agency? Finally, will he confirm that our preferred arrangement for the period of transition is as close as possible to the current status quo?

Two other points are worth mentioning. They are about matters that the Bill does not cover. First, the NIA has spelt out clearly that Euratom does not manage the safety of the UK's nuclear sites, which is, and always has been, determined by the UK, overseen by the Office for Nuclear Regulation; it is important that all our constituents understand that. Secondly, as the Secretary of State spelt out earlier, the radioisotopes are not special fissile nuclear material and their availability will absolutely not be impacted by our leaving Euratom. That is incredibly important for anyone who is worried about the impact of this on our health service.

This is a contingency Bill. The Government recognise our clear goal of securing third-party status with Euratom so that we can have the continuity that is clearly being sought by the entire civil nuclear sector, but they are also putting in place legislative arrangements for the Office for Nuclear Regulation to carry out the nuclear safeguarding work currently done by Euratom if, for whatever reason, that does not happen. The arguments—that is a flattering word to use—put up by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition were riddled with inconsistencies, as their own Members have shown. However, I would not disagree with anything said by the hon. Member for Leeds West, especially on transition and associate membership. I hope that, recognising the importance of contingency planning as she does, she and indeed all Members of this House will, like me, vote for the Bill tonight.

7.41 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Chair. I am pleased to be speaking in the debate on the Nuclear Safeguards Bill, but what I have found, Madam Chair, I mean Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Members: It's Madam Deputy Speaker.

Patricia Gibson: That is what I said—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. There is no need for hon. Members to contradict the hon. Lady, although I know that they are trying to be helpful. She made a slip of the tongue in referring to me as a Chair rather than as a Deputy Speaker, but I know what she meant.

Patricia Gibson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased to be speaking in this debate. Once again, we are in a debate where we are all promised a post-Brexit world that is shinier, better and newer than anything we have witnessed up to this point. Whether we are talking about nuclear safeguards, food safety standards, consumer rights, trade with the EU, the strength of the pound, UK nationals living abroad, EU nationals living in the UK, or 30% being wiped off the bond yields leaving a £1.8 trillion black hole in our public sector pensions bill, we are told that it will be all right on the night and that everything will be wonderful.

The fact is that no state has ever left Euratom before. Despite what we have heard in the Chamber today, some legal experts—I know that we do not always like listening to experts—believe that it would be perfectly possible for the United Kingdom to leave the EU and remain a member of Euratom because, despite sharing the institutions, the two treaties are distinct and have separate legal instruments. I urge the Minister to explore that. The nuclear industry certainly believes that the UK should pursue some form of continuing membership of Euratom. We do not know what form that will take. We have no details or certainty. I think I probably speak for a large chunk of the public across the United Kingdom when I say that the UK Government's negotiating skills have not inspired confidence.

I remember sitting in a Committee and being told by the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), who is now the Leader of the House, that it was necessary and, indeed, essential for us to fly nuclear materials across UK skies so that they could be used in a range of medical treatments at the height of their efficacy. Experts now tell us that leaving Europe's nuclear regulator will put patients in the UK at risk of losing access to vital medical treatments, but those concerns have been dismissed by Conservative Members. Despite what we have heard tonight, withdrawal from Euratom as part of Brexit would make it harder for the UK to access the nuclear isotopes used in cancer treatments and medical imaging. It is not me who is saying this—I confess that I do not have the medical or scientific expertise to do so—but the Royal College of Radiologists has told us that this is the case, as has Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

I could give the House 20 other examples of people at the top of their game who have told us this, but I fear that I lack the time to do so. Despite all that, those concerns were utterly dismissed by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who is no longer in his place, and the Secretary of State told us that these matters are not within the scope of the Bill. I fear that such a response is not reassuring. I am also alarmed, as I am sure many others will be, that someone who is qualified as an economist sees fit to contradict medical experts.

[Patricia Gibson]

Euratom is responsible for co-ordinating and regulating the transport, use and disposal of nuclear materials in Europe, including many of the isotopes used in radiotherapy and some kinds of body scans. It seems that some of the most widely used medical isotopes can be produced only in specialised reactors, none of which is located in the United Kingdom. The materials currently used in Britain are mostly manufactured in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Experts have told us that there is “no excuse” for Government Ministers failing to foresee the problems that leaving Euratom would cause. They have also indicated, given that all these matters are subject to negotiation, that although it might be possible for the UK to remain within the existing arrangements, it would be “exceptionally complicated” and that the UK’s position would “inevitably be weakened”. Those are the words of medical experts at the top of their field. Crucially, no real clarity on how any agreement might be achieved by the UK Government has been forthcoming. The Government’s position paper on Euratom published in July contained little detail even on nuclear power and it did not mention medical isotopes. Perhaps the Minister would care to mention them today. Can he also tell us whether the Secretary of State for Health has been consulted on this matter?

Ministers have absolutely no excuse for failing to anticipate this controversy. The problems were clearly highlighted in an article in the *Financial Times* way back in February and in briefings by nuclear industry experts. I know that we do not like experts, but occasionally it is useful to listen to them. As with all aspects of Brexit, there is little evidence of any serious planning.

Kwasi Kwarteng: The whole purpose of this Bill is to plan for the contingency where we leave Euratom, so how can the hon. Lady say that?

Patricia Gibson: We have heard repeatedly from those on the Conservative Benches about transitional arrangements and avoiding a cliff edge, but everything is subject to negotiation. As I said earlier, the negotiating and diplomatic skills of the UK Government are deeply suspect, and at worst alarming, when it comes to dealing with Europe.

Dame Sue Ion, the honorary president of the National Skills Academy for Nuclear and a former chair of the Nuclear Innovation Research Advisory Board, has pointed out that

“if suitable and robust alternatives to leaving Euratom are not in place, the potential impact”—

may mean that we—

“cannot move material or intellectual property or services or components or medical isotopes.”

That view was echoed by Rupert Cowen, a senior nuclear energy lawyer, who has been critical of Government officials, whom he called “ignorant” of the impact of leaving Euratom because they

“think it’ll be all right on the night. It won’t.”

If he is tired of hearing that it will be all right on the night with regard to Euratom, imagine what he would make of the list at the start of my speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker, may I crave the indulgence of the Chamber for a few more minutes? I cannot let this debate pass without mentioning something that is

not strictly within the scope of the Bill. I fear that we cannot talk about nuclear safety and regulation without pointing to another threat that looms large.

James Cleverly: I chose not to bring this up when the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman was speaking, but the Bill has nothing to do with nuclear safety. It is about nuclear safeguarding. The words are similar, but they have a fundamentally different meaning.

Patricia Gibson: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is making a point about a legalistic separation, but when I speak to constituents about nuclear safeguards and nuclear safety—his experience may be different—the two things are entwined. To separate regulation and safety legally may be one thing, but to separate them when discussing them with constituents is another.

Alan Brown: My hon. Friend has already made her point perfectly, but for absolute clarity about the overlap between nuclear safeguards and nuclear safety, the House of Commons Library briefing on Euratom states that delays in making reciprocal arrangements

“would have consequences for current operation, waste and decommissioning, and to new builds such as Hinkley Point.”

If there will be an impact on nuclear decommissioning, does my hon. Friend agree that involves safety risks?

Patricia Gibson: My hon. Friend makes that point with his usual succinct articulation of the facts.

Before I conclude, it would be remiss of me not to mention something that is outside the scope of the Bill, but very much at home in any debate about nuclear safeguards, nuclear regulation or nuclear safety. Last week, I met the Civil Nuclear Police Federation and was appalled to hear of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary’s concerns. In partnership with the civil nuclear industry, national security agencies and regulatory bodies, the force works to deter any attacker whose intent is the theft or sabotage of nuclear material, whether static or in transit. Should such an attack be made, the CNC will defend that material and access to it. If such material is seized or if high-consequence facilities are compromised, the CNC will recover control of the facility and regain custody of the material. Its officers are therefore heavily armed and have high levels of physical fitness. Their retirement age has been increased to 67 or 68, and I was deeply disappointed that the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), has not met those officers, who do such an important job in guarding our safety and often work in harm’s way. I urge him to make the time to meet them.

I also urge the Minister to explore fully all legal avenues and opinions for the UK to remain a member of Euratom, which provides a framework for international nuclear safeguarding compliance and undertakes safeguards, inspections and reporting. Indeed, dispensing with the UK’s international treaty obligations on issues such as non-proliferation that are managed through Euratom will undoubtedly damage the UK’s nuclear industry, jeopardise high-quality jobs in engineering and chemistry and do much to undermine confidence in the UK’s already significantly diminishing international influence.

Drew Hendry: My hon. Friend makes a key point about the breadth of issues that are not covered by the Bill's narrow focus. Government Members would like to separate safety issues and the unanswered questions that are legion here tonight, but that is the real problem.

Patricia Gibson: I think all Opposition Members sense the unease with which Government Members are unwilling to talk about the Bill's narrow scope, which leaves so many uncertainties and questions. We are all rightly concerned about nuclear safety, but in our discussions let us remember to give a break to the brave officers of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, who work day in, day out to maintain nuclear safety across the UK.

7.54 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Realising the risk that I take by making this comparison, may I say that it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson)? She and I served on the Procedure Committee together for some time. I listened to her speech with great attention, but I have to say in all good humour that she did a very good caricature of the P. G. Wodehouse quote that it is not very hard to distinguish between a Scotsman or Scotswoman and a ray of sunshine. Her speech was the Don Quixote speech of this debate: there is nothing good in the Bill; we are all going to go to hell in a handcart and—*[Interruption.]*

Kwasi Kwarteng: We're all doomed!

Simon Hoare: And we're all doomed, as I hear my hon. Friend say from a sedentary position.

Let me start by saying what this important Bill is not about. I do not believe that it is a Brexit virility test. I happen to believe that voters on both sides in the referendum will want to see the Bill delivered and landed safely through our proper procedures. I gave my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) prior warning that I would challenge his assertion that one of the core reasons that motivated him to vote to leave the EU was that we would leave Euratom. I simply do not believe my hon. Friend—despite his cerebral dexterity—when he says that millions of people tootled off to the polling station in their droves to vote leave because it provided the opportunity to leave Euratom. In exactly the same way, I did not vote to remain because I thought that our membership of Euratom might be in jeopardy. I must confess to the House that I am part of probably 98% of the nation that had no clue what Euratom was or did, who was a member, that we were a member or about the excellent work that we did.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was suggesting that he was precisely the only person in Britain who had gone to the polls in order to leave Euratom, so my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) is making his point for him.

Simon Hoare: I still remain to be convinced, but I will not push that particular proposition to a Division this evening.

It strikes me that the position of most speakers in this debate rather echoes what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said in

an intervention on the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. If I heard him correctly, he said that Euratom has done nothing wrong, we are not annoyed with it, and it has not offended us in any way, but lawyers on this side of the Channel and lawyers for the European Union have said that triggering article 50 means that we will de facto leave Euratom, which requires a further and separate discussion. I say with the utmost respect to colleagues on both sides on the House who have had a legal calling in the past—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) chunters from a sedentary position. No doubt there will be an invoice for me in the post for that chuntering.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is a great pleasure for a lawyer to hear some pleasant congratulatory words from a colleague in the House? I just could not resist saying, "Hear, hear!" which I think is in order.

Simon Hoare: It is indeed, and who in their right mind would ever criticise a lawyer?

If we and the EU do not like the legal advice, and if we want somehow to disaggregate membership of the EU and of Euratom, we could possibly get some different lawyers to say something different. I must say that I am about to dash out and get myself the stiffest of stiff drinks, because I am going to do something that I never thought I would do—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting that the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), arrives in the Chamber just at this moment—his stage timing is exemplary—because I am going to pray in aid one Mr Dominic Cummings, a man I have not joined on a campaigning platform before. If even Mr Cummings, getting terribly hot under the collar, does not believe that leaving Euratom is some sort of demonstration of Brexit adherence or virility or some test to be passed, that should give us pause for thought. Because Euratom has not done anything wrong, and because it has not offended against the principles of this House or the country, I fully commend the strategy adopted by Her Majesty's Government. We need to be pragmatic and sensible in laying the foundations for this important part of our economic life in case, at the end of the process, we find ourselves having to leave. I do not know whether we will end up like Switzerland, which has special status and is seen as an equal partner, or whether we will end up like the United States of America or Australia, which have looser agreements but are not seen as equal partners. Let us see.

Whatever we do and however we do it, I hope it will always be underpinned by the guiding principle that our decisions benefit our constituents and the country at large.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill provides a level of reassurance to the nuclear industry and its 65,000 jobs in this country?

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion of engineering, research and innovation in this place and in her constituency, and she makes an apposite point. Anyone who wants to see Brexit a success needs to understand that we will have political processes but that the regulatory and business communities want clarity and certainty at the earliest possible point. I agree

[Simon Hoare]

with her entirely that the Bill provides that bridge, for want of a better analogy, between membership now and a regulatory regime in the future.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way once again. Is it not particularly significant that this is part of a contingency plan, in the light of the objections that we will somehow have a so-called hard Brexit?

Simon Hoare: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. It certainly shoots the fox that we will have a bonfire of regulations and a race to the bottom. I find it strange that those who have spoken against the Bill this evening have, in one breath, accused the Government of presiding over a chaotic, shambolic and uncontrolled, if not incontinent, Brexit process and have then chastised the Government for trying to ensure continuity at an early stage, as my hon. Friend and others have said. Such continuity is welcome, and we would be right to chastise the Government were we not to have it.

If the Bill is not a debate about Brexit virility, it is also certainly not about access to isotopes, and I absolutely deplore those who have tried to wave that shroud. One of my hon. Friends—I was going to say it was my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), but I do not think it was her—said that access to isotopes is important for a large number of our constituents who need them for medical treatment when they are unwell, and it is the worst kind of shroud waving to say that they will not have that access.

Patricia Gibson: The hon. Gentleman criticises those who have raised concerns about access to medical isotopes, who were echoing the medical experts in the field. Is he dismissing the legitimate concerns raised by those working in the medical field?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Lady falls into a classic trap. I am not one who seeks to dismiss experts—as a non-expert, I always turn to experts for advice—but a concern that is wrong in fact does not become legitimate if it is raised by an expert. A person could be concerned about all sorts of things, and they could have as many letters after their name as they like, but they are not always correct. Some Opposition Members started to fan the embers of this flame about three or four months ago, and it does not appear to have caught.

I have received a briefing note, as I am sure have other colleagues, entitled “What about medical radioisotopes?” The import or export of medical radioisotopes is not subject to any Euratom licensing requirements. Let us seek to assure the experts who have concerns—their concerns are legitimate, and the House must address them—that Euratom places no restrictions on the export of medical isotopes to countries outside the EU. These isotopes are not subject to Euratom supply agency contracts or to Euratom safeguards, which means no special arrangements need to be put in place ahead of withdrawal.

Withdrawal from Euratom will have no effect on the UK’s ability to import medical isotopes from Europe and the rest of the world. It is in everyone’s interest not to disrupt patients’ timely access to treatment, and it is

in everyone’s interest to ensure that cross-border trade with the EU is as frictionless as possible. I entirely take the point raised by several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), that some of these products have a short shelf life, and clearly we cannot have these products sitting in an overheated metal container at the port of Dover or Calais.

Out of common sense I have to ask which country on God’s earth will set a tariff barrier regime and seek to take beyond its useful lifespan a vital component in the delivery of medical care. In the French Government, the German Government and the Belgian Government, we are not dealing with countries that have no interest in public health and healthcare, because of course they do, as do our Government. The idea that those countries will deliberately set up barriers that cause these products to pass their sell-by date, like a piece of chicken that has been sat too long on a supermarket shelf, is fanciful and compounds the allegation that I and several of my hon. Friends have made, that the Bill can be criticised for other reasons, but it is cruel, callous and unnecessary to criticise it at the expense of unsettling people who require medical interventions.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for largely making my point for me. He knows my deep interest in this area, and I draw to his attention the fact that not only has the Secretary of State reiterated those points today but that the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation firmly made them back in June.

Are the expert opinions that my hon. Friend is addressing recent, or are they historical?

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. These debates often get stuck in a groove on the gramophone, the needle gets stuck and we do not knock it forward. I think it was John Maynard Keynes who said, “When the facts change, I change my mind.” A concern is raised, it is addressed, it ceases to be a concern and we move on to something else. I am not saying there will be no other concerns.

Alan Brown *rose*—

Simon Hoare: On the subject of concerns, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Alan Brown: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us when the Royal College of Radiologists, Dame Sue Ion or the Nuclear Industry Association changed their mind? The Nuclear Industry Association’s latest briefing came out today, and it still expresses the same concerns. Who are all these people who have suddenly changed their mind?

Simon Hoare: I apologise for seeking to remake this point for the convenience of the hon. Gentleman, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am simply saying this: irrespective of how we might have campaigned and voted in the referendum, this is a time when we have a responsibility, as parliamentarians, to make sure that on certain key things—something as sensitive as this is a key thing—we set aside our personal beefs on whether it is a good or bad idea, in order to make sure our constituents are not alarmed. We have heard from the Secretary of State, read the briefing papers and heard from the Universities Minister, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury

St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) has pointed out, and that should now shoot that fox well and truly. What has been suggested is not going to be a by-product of coming out of Euratom.

Patricia Gibson: I just want to clarify this point, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will not try to intervene again, because I am sure he will answer it well, and I hope he understands that I have enormous respect for him. I understand that he has a background in public relations, so given his background and level of expertise in his field, is he comfortable with contradicting and dismissing as “scaremongering”, “overreacting” or whatever word he wants to use, the legitimate concerns raised by the Royal College of Radiologists?

Simon Hoare: I am not contradicting. I am seeking to answer—

Alan Brown: You are dismissing them—

Simon Hoare: No, this is not dismissing them either. Are Members honestly saying that when a question is asked and someone answers it, weight can only be given to that answer if it compounds the premise of the question that was raised? [*Interruption.*] That might be how the Scottish National party goes about doing its politics and its business, but it is not a particularly good way of doing it. People have raised a concern that leaving Euratom may well have an impact on access to this vital ingredient. As this vital ingredient is not covered by Euratom now, it goes beyond eccentricity to suggest that by coming out of this organisation some sort of control is going to be placed on this ingredient, as the organisation we are potentially leaving does not have control of its trade in the first place. I say to Opposition Members that that is a non sequitur. We have been trying to answer calmly and rationally a concern raised by serious and sensible medical practitioners, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds mentioned, we have heard from our Science Minister, who is held in high regard by those in the scientific and medical research community, irrespective of any of their political affiliations. Save for slashing our wrists and writing it in our life’s blood on the wall here in the House of Commons, I am not sure what assurance SNP Members are going to accept.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend think SNP Members will accept that it is ludicrous to imply that medical isotopes would not be able to be imported should we leave Euratom, given that countries currently not in that organisation are importing those medical isotopes at the moment?

Simon Hoare: Once again, my hon. Friend makes the point in the most telling way. If we are providing no illumination to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), we are obviously providing a vast amount of humorous entertainment; I am glad she sees this issue as being so hysterically funny. I do not think setting a regulatory regime to allow all of our constituents to have ready access to a medical treatment is anything particularly to laugh about. People can accuse me of being po-faced and a prig if they so wish, and I could almost hear the Twittersphere doing just that as the words left my mouth, but I do not see this as a particularly funny point. My hon. Friend has made the point tellingly: countries that are not part of Euratom are importing isotopes in due time so that their shelf life

does not expire. Unless we have some peculiar, Machiavellian, under-the-counter sort of plan to deny people medical treatment by putting the largest possible tariff barriers on these things and making sure that the inventor carries them across the channel in some sort of purpose-made velvet case that has been hand-sewn by his ancient grandmother, I really do not think this is going to be the situation. Therefore, the concern raised by medics can now be set aside.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that medical isotopes and some associated equipment are also very high value, so it is not in the interests of those who manufacture and seek to export to us to put obstacles in the way of selling high-value, highly profitable pieces of equipment or machinery, be they the isotopes or anything related to them?

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend gets the point, because he takes a Conservative approach to the operation of the economy. People in Britain want to buy something. We do not make it, but some countries overseas do. But we have also heard this, “We make too much for our domestic market and we want to sell it overseas. We have been doing this for years, but, do you know what? Just to bite off our nose to spite our face, we’ll stop doing it.” That is the crux of the argument we have heard from the hon. Members for North Ayrshire and Arran and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). I would say it was bizarre if it were not so careless.

Let me conclude my remarks by returning to the point about the value—soft as well as hard—to UK plc of the collaborative opportunities for research that membership of an organisation such as Euratom presents. We have heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) about the supply chain, the jobs and the offshoots of economic activity that flow from this. If we are talking about background research, I understand that the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran has a nuclear facility in her constituency. One can only presume that she has constituents who work in it, but she said precious little about them in her speech—

Patricia Gibson: That was not in the scope of the Bill.

Simon Hoare: Well, that did not stop the hon. Lady dilating on lots of other things that were not in the Bill. This sudden stricture of rectitude and probity that she cloaks herself in as the winter months approach is a little hard to take. We should never underestimate what that collaborative research does to advance the sum of human knowledge, and to benefit our country in hard currency terms and profile terms as a centre of excellence, expertise, professionalism and world leadership. I see this Bill as very much taking a belt-and-braces approach. I just hope that if we have to default to this, because we find that the lawyers are right or we are not allowed to remain part of Euratom as there is some conflict with the European Court of Justice or whatever, the regimes we put in place and the culture we create tell the rest of the world interested in this sector that we, too, are open for business and committed to research, and we are not turning our back on academic and, yes, medical collaboration.

8.19 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare).

I support the Bill. The introduction of a Bill on nuclear safeguards is an entirely sensible contingency measure. It is sensible to cater for the possibility that no associate membership of Euratom can be agreed; indeed, given the importance of the matters covered by our current membership, it would be extraordinary were the Government not to do so. I have listened with interest to the Opposition speeches but, ultimately, they resulted in sound and fury signifying nothing, because it appears that no one is going to vote against the Bill's Second Reading.

Alan Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether the Bill is a contingency and a back-up or the bright, shining new way forward? Mixed messages are coming from Government Members.

Alex Chalk: It is a sensible contingency to deal with safeguarding. We will no doubt be able to consider other aspects in due course.

Were the Government not to introduce the Bill, they would be in complete dereliction of their duty. The background is as follows: the UK has a strong and developed nuclear sector, with 15 nuclear reactors generating 21% of our electricity; there is something in the order of 30 licensed nuclear sites; and our nuclear industry serves important civilian purposes, including medicine, transport, farming and industrial processes.

It is worth my taking a moment to reflect on the Bill's key purpose, which is to give the Office for Nuclear Regulation—a UK body—powers to take on the roles and responsibilities required for us to meet our international safeguarding and nuclear non-proliferation obligations. What does that mean? In other words, it is to demonstrate and ensure that civil nuclear material is used only for civil purposes, not military ones.

It is also worth reflecting on what the Bill is not about. First, notwithstanding the points made by the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), it is not about security standards in the UK. The security standards relate to the physical protection measures. The UK already follows the convention on the physical protection of nuclear material, which is outwith the scope of the Bill. Indeed, the related responsibilities are already within the ambit of the ONR.

Secondly, the Bill is not about safety standards for the prevention of nuclear accidents. We will continue to observe the standards imposed by the International Atomic Energy Agency, overseen by the ONR. We have heard a bit about medical isotopes, which are not special fissile material, so I do not propose to traverse the ground that has already been ably ventilated by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset.

It is clear, though, that our membership of Euratom covers far more than safeguarding. I wish to develop a little the points that were helpfully set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey). First, on research and development such as that on fusion technologies, we need to continue our collaborations. We heard a little about the JET scheme, which ends in 2018,

although the Government have rightly committed funding for it in case it is extended to 2020. We want that co-operation to continue.

Secondly, there is the international thermonuclear experimental reactor project to build the world's largest tokamak—at that point, my expertise starts to evaporate, but it is important.

Thirdly, the Government have already committed to funding the Horizon 2020 projects that were entered into before March 2019—the date of our departure—even if they continue after our departure. That is absolutely the right thing to do. All that underscores the importance of such projects to our economy and the European economy more widely.

After research and development, the second area that the Bill does not cover but in the perpetuation of which we have a strong national interest is nuclear co-operation arrangements, and we have heard a little about Australia, Japan, the United States and Canada. Those agreements matter because the United States cannot enter into trade agreements with the UK unless NCAs are in place. That is vital.

The third point that bears re-emphasis is the free movement of highly expert scientists. All three things must be secured, and the easiest and most sensible way to do so would be through associate membership of Euratom. It is worth making the point that there is no off-the-shelf solution: the Swiss associate membership relates only to scientific and technological co-operation and the Ukrainian model is even more limited.

The Bill is entirely necessary and entirely sensible, but in a way it is just the easy bit. Just as vital is that we secure co-operation in all the other areas, too. I have already said a little about associate membership, which I suspect is the most straightforward way to deliver that co-operation, but there might be others. I have every confidence that once this sensible contingency legislation on safeguarding is securely enacted, moving on to other matters is precisely what the Government will go on to do.

8.25 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), and before him my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who looks like he is about to leave the Chamber. It is always a pleasure to follow the latter, but although he has many qualities, brevity is perhaps not one of them.

The Bill is important, and I very much hope that its Second Reading will be unopposed. It is a crucial part of the Brexit process and I believe it will be able to operate with or without an EU deal. That flexibility is provided in the middle section of the Bill. Despite what was said by some of the Labour Back Benchers who were present earlier, it is absolutely clear that a country cannot remain a member of Euratom if it is outside the EU. It is not just the UK Government who make that point; the EU Commission makes that point. If someone says to the Government, "Let's see your legal advice, because we don't believe you. We have no faith in that opinion", they should also say that to the EU Commission and ask it why it is putting out that opinion and saying that it is absolutely correct that a country cannot be in Euratom if it is outside the EU. Nevertheless, our current safeguards relate to our being members of Euratom, so it is right that we have a Bill that will enable those safeguards to be replaced when we leave the EU.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): It seems to me that the Bill is not only a contingency plan but a crucial building block for our negotiation. Our negotiation requires legislation such as this Bill, so that we can get everything else sorted and get a decent agreement with Euratom.

Gareth Johnson: The Government have been absolutely clear that they must prepare for all eventualities, and that is precisely what is currently happening.

I congratulate the Minister on putting resources into the country's nuclear industry. It is essential to ensure that British nuclear fusion research continues when we leave Euratom. We have invested a huge amount of time, resources and effort in becoming a world leader in this field, and we must not allow our status to diminish. The Culham Centre has been mentioned a few times. It is not the only centre that specialises in such work, but it is crucial and it employs many people. It is essential that the Government do all they can to protect its valuable work and keep its workers in place.

I am pleased that the Minister has found some funding for the JET project, which has massive potential in the nuclear fusion industry. It is hard to overstate just what advances can be achieved if we ensure that the investment in that project continues not just in the UK, but across the world.

All too often we are a little too apologetic about our work in this industry when, in fact, successive Governments can be incredibly proud of our work on nuclear safeguards. We have a proven track record as a nuclear weapon state; we have signed the non-proliferation treaty; we have worked at the heart of the IAEA since its inception and we will continue to work with it and uphold our international obligations. That is something about which we can hold our head high. We can be very proud of the fact that, right from the beginning, we have been one of the few countries that has said that non-nuclear countries should remain so without any assistance from nuclear countries. That is vital.

We have also worked very well with the EU over safeguarding, and can continue to do so in the future, but we will need this Bill to enable that to happen. The Bill will ensure that safeguards can continue uninterrupted and that collaboration with the EU can continue. The expertise that we have heard a lot about from both sides of the Chamber today can be shared between nations and with the EU and around the world. It is clear that the European Union and the UK have a strong mutual interest in ensuring that this close co-operation continues in the future. That was set out very clearly in the position paper of the Department for Exiting the European Union—the Government's nuclear materials and safeguards paper—that was published in July. We have been very open in our positioning papers about our stance in negotiations, and in July we gave a clear indication of where we wanted to go with this particular issue.

There is no reason why we cannot have a safe, pioneering, co-operative and responsible nuclear industry after Brexit. Yes, decisions will have to be made and agreements reached on issues such as the ownership of property at Culham. My understanding is that Euratom owns some of the property at our centres and that there will have to be some negotiations over who should continue to own that property once Brexit takes place, but, like so many other things involving Brexit, that can be resolved through negotiation.

In conclusion, this Bill will provide continuity, reassurance, protections and safeguards for the whole of this country and the whole of the industry and therefore should be given its Second Reading today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It will be obvious to the House that a great many Members wish to take part in this important debate and that, although all speakers from the Opposition Benches have completed their speeches, a great many Members on the Government Benches wish to speak. I am afraid that I will have to impose a time limit from now on of six minutes. I am sorry that that may come as a surprise to Mr Mark Menzies, but I am sure that he will be able to deal with the matter.

8.32 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am devastated by the news that I have been cut down to a mere six minutes, but I will do what I can.

This nuclear safeguard Bill is of real importance not just to me and to my constituency, but to the 1,200 people who work at Springfields nuclear fuels in my constituency. Springfields is at the heart of the British nuclear industry. We are the only site in the UK to manufacture nuclear fuel. As we have already heard this evening, 21% of the UK's electricity production is produced from nuclear energy, and a great swathe of that is from nuclear fuel manufactured in Fylde.

Whenever I hear the phrase “northern powerhouse”, I think not just of the nuclear industry in the north-west, but of the nuclear fuel that is manufactured in my Fylde constituency. I have met both the workforce and the management in recent months. Initially, there were some real concerns over the UK's possible exit from Euratom and what that would mean for the continuity of supply. However, in conversations with the Minister, I have been deeply reassured by the fact that this is a Government who are working towards the possibility of remaining a member of Euratom and, if we cannot do that, of ensuring that we are safeguarding Britain's civil nuclear interests by having these measures firmly in place in this Bill.

This is not just about dealing with trade between the UK and Europe, important though that is. Springfields Fuels is owned by Westinghouse, a company with quite complex ownership—both Japanese and American footprints. Therefore, any deal or legislation must be compliant with what our Japanese and American partners have in place. I am reassured by the Minister's words in our meeting last week and in the debate this evening that this Bill will, indeed, cover that.

The nuclear industry must be able to trade from the first post-Brexit moment. Without implementation of the safeguards in the Bill, the UK would be unable to put the nuclear co-operation agreements in place in the future. Those are currently provided under the Euratom regime and they are vital because this is about not just dealing with Europe, but all our international partnerships. We are not just talking about nuclear fuel in its completed form, but oxides, pellets and the various added-value products that a company such as Springfields Fuels puts into the nuclear supply chain. If we do not get this right, the jobs of British people could ultimately be at risk and moved elsewhere. It is not about keeping

[Mark Menzies]

lawyers busy. I am delighted that the Minister understands that, has looked at all aspects of the UK civil nuclear industry and has made sure that the measures will protect not just the nuclear industry in the abstract sense, but real people and real jobs now and in the future. That is something for which we should be grateful.

Time is working against me, so I will move on to my final point. I ask the Minister to ensure that the measures in the Bill protect future programmes, one of the most important of which is that of small modular reactors. If the United Kingdom gets it right, we could be world leaders in this technology. That would be a game-changer for the nuclear supply chain. Fuel would be manufactured in the UK. In fact, huge proportions of everything—from research and development through to manufacture—could be done in the UK. That would become a highly exportable technology. Rather than importing much of the new nuclear technology from overseas, the United Kingdom can own it and, surely, emerging new nuclear technology must be at the forefront of shaping our post-Brexit destiny. I hope that the Minister can assure me that the Government will think about and protect SMRs in the detail of the legislation. That is also important for Moorside. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who is not currently in her place, is a passionate campaigner for Moorside, and such technology would bring jobs to Cumbria. The fuel from Moorside would also be manufactured at Springfields Fuels nuclear plant. Therefore, the measures in the Bill really are important to ensuring jobs and the futures of all our economies, particularly those in the north-west.

8.38 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies). I join in this debate not as a Member who has a particularly close partnership with the nuclear industry, nor as someone with specific knowledge of Euratom. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) says that he voted to leave because of Euratom, but, a little like my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), I cannot possibly say that I voted to remain because of it. However, the nuclear industry and our nuclear future in all its guises is extremely important to us all. To that end, the Bill is a necessary measure in response to the decisions taken after the referendum—a plan B, as some have referred to it. I urge everyone to join me in giving the Bill an unopposed passage through the House this evening.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while membership of Euratom has served the UK well, it is only prudent and simply good governance that we are prepared for every eventuality? It is common sense, which is perhaps why there are so few Opposition Members participating in and listening to this debate.

Jo Churchill: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend that this is common sense. The Opposition argue that we are being presumptive, but we are just being thoughtful by ensuring that things are in place to ensure a smooth passage.

As has been said, this is about soft collaboration. It is an important opportunity to reiterate that the Government's aim is to ensure that collaborative research

and development continues, with close working relationships between universities, both in Europe and across the world, and other organisations.

It is clear that nuclear is a global industry, given the foreign investment in the UK nuclear industry from France and China. The issue is particularly pertinent in Suffolk, with EDF and Sizewell C due to come on stream. It is for that reason that our future relationship with the European Union is so important to understanding the future of the sector in the UK, as well as what it will mean for jobs, skills and businesses.

I am reassured by the Bill's commitment to maintaining our current safeguards and standards under Euratom. By leaving those unchanged, the UK can guarantee a close working relationship with the Euratom community and those further afield. That is a wise decision to ensure close working with our natural partners, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and others have said.

Closer to home, Sizewell C on the Suffolk coast is under consideration, having completed stage 2 of the consultation process. Its potential is huge: it could power 6 million homes with clean, affordable nuclear energy and create 26,000 jobs and apprenticeships in the region. It would be at the cutting edge of the UK nuclear industry and receive significant international investment. That point was ably made by my hon. Friends the Members for Fylde and for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who stated that the nuclear industry gives nearly £1 billion to the UK economy. It is important that we acknowledge its monetary significance.

West Suffolk College in my constituency is a national centre for nuclear and it is preparing for Sizewell C. East Anglia is fast proving its worth as a crucial region for skills, research and innovation, with Cambridge sitting at its heart.

I appreciate that the Bill does not cover EU research funding, but given that we are discussing the UK's nuclear industry, it would not be amiss to remind the House that the UK is a world leader in the most promising nuclear fusion technologies, which is not something on which we intend to compromise on Brexit. As my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde has said, we could be a world leader and it is important that we have the appropriate safeguards in place. That is why a smooth transition, which is contingent on continuity for the sector, is so vital.

The UK wants to explore ways in which continued collaboration, including in nuclear research and training, can be taken forward. For a vibrant region such as East Anglia, that is crucial not just for the possibility of major nuclear investment on our coast, but so that any investment opportunities are not lost on Brexit. Part of that understanding is that all our obligations on safeguards are met. We need to ensure that all systems are transparent and accountable with regard to material and how it is kept.

I will close my speech with two wider points thrown up by the Bill, and I hope the Minister will respond to them when he sums up the debate. On nuclear safeguarding in our communities, what assessment has he made of the role that my outstanding West Suffolk College and other colleges could play as centres of learning for any nuclear engineering apprentices working on my coastline

and others, including Hinkley and the north-west? How will safeguards be built into that training? How will we future proof those people whom we will employ in the industry? How does the ONR cascade information through this system? Hinkley Point is a crucial model to learn from for future nuclear projects in the UK, especially in relation to its funding models.

As we leave the European Union, the need to draw skills and jobs to keep our nuclear sector vibrant becomes arguably more urgent, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) said. That includes those whose skills lie in repositories. We must ensure that we are scoping for the skills needed as we withdraw from Euratom so that we have, as this Bill states, a seamless continuation of the high standards of this industry, and the UK maximises and, as the Secretary of State said, even raises the standards within the IAEA.

8.45 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I am genuinely pleased that this issue has been given such importance. That is not because, as some might have suggested, it is a sort of remoaner ambush, but because it reflects the importance of our nuclear industry, which in turn reflects the importance that the Government have attached to nuclear technologies in the UK as part of our industrial strategy. The valued engagement of the industry is most welcome. It is great to hear its very legitimate concerns over Euratom. The industry would obviously want no change whatsoever: of course not; nobody can blame it for seeking certainly and therefore advocating the status quo.

Let us be clear: there is absolutely nothing wrong with Euratom. It has proven very effective at regulating the nuclear industry. If the treaty did not require us to leave after triggering article 50, I am pretty sure that we would not do so, but as it does require it, a new arrangement must be sought. I genuinely have no doubt that this new arrangement will be characterised by keen agreement and co-operation between the UK and our EU partners. The nuclear industry is, after all, international and interdependent. We have significant French ownership of our nuclear power stations, and further international ownership is promised with the remainder of the new nuclear fleet. Similarly, Germany has a great deal of nuclear waste being processed in Sellafield. With the UK, France and Germany so interdependent on one another on matters nuclear, one might expect the wind to be on our backs, not in our faces, when seeking a deal on our future relationship on nuclear matters.

An associate membership is probable—highly probable, even. For the more ardent Brexiteers among us, that should not bother us either. Euratom has been a remarkably consensual organisation—I do not believe there have been any votes—and therefore the jurisdiction of the EU Court should not be a concern for us in this case. However, regardless of that probable outcome, we need something else in case good sense deserts our EU partners and nuclear safeguarding becomes part of the wider wrangling over Brexit. That is why the Government are to be congratulated on introducing the Bill so soon. This regulation will give the nuclear industry the certainty that it so reasonably demands. Nuclear safeguarding is not something on which we take risks. Pursuing a favourable post-Brexit relationship with Euratom is important and should obviously be our preference, but legislating for increased powers in the Office for Nuclear

Regulation so that Euratom's capabilities are duplicated as being sovereign within the United Kingdom seems very prudent at this early stage.

After this debate, it is important to pause and reflect on what neither the Bill nor Euratom does. Euratom does not do nuclear safety—that is already regulated in the United Kingdom by the ONR. My constituents who live as neighbours to Hinkley Point know that the safety regulations that govern the operation of that site are entirely unaffected by the Euratom issue. Nor does the Bill affect isotopes used in medicine. The scaremongering on this has been unfortunate, and I hope that it will not continue as the Bill progresses.

Drew Hendry: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. Does he, then, disagree with the Nuclear Industry Association? It has said:

“Leaving the Euratom Treaty without alternative arrangements in place would have a dramatic impact on the nuclear industry including the UK's new build plans, existing operations and the waste and decommissioning sector which all depend, to some extent, on cooperation with nuclear states.”

James Heapey: I am absolutely at a loss to understand the SNP's position on this. We have an excellent relationship with Euratom, which we want, ideally, to continue as an associate member. But, as the hon. Gentleman quite rightly points out, the nuclear industry is very concerned that, if that arrangement turns out not to be possible, we should have some sort of contingency in place to ensure that the industry can continue to operate safely and co-operate internationally. That is exactly what the Bill will do, so I do not understand why he is not welcoming it with open arms.

Drew Hendry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to clarify. The key is in the final part of the quote, which talks about the impact on existing operations and the waste and decommissioning sectors. That cannot be carried forward by the Bill in isolation; there are many unanswered questions.

James Heapey: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman adds anything to his earlier intervention. There is a system in place through Euratom for the regulation and safeguarding of the movement of fissile materials and other issues connected to nuclear regulation. We would ideally stay within Euratom as an associate member, but if that is not possible, we seek to legislate for a contingency, so that we have those powers sovereign. One would assume that the Government—I think that this has been made very clear in the Secretary of State's opening remarks and all the Government's commentary on the matter thus far—expect to continue everything exactly as it is, so that we can continue to operate seamlessly internationally. The Bill will provide a contingency plan to avoid the hard exit or cliff edge that so many in this place and in the media seem so vexed about. I just do not understand why the SNP does not welcome the Bill, when it appears to give the party exactly what it wants by delivering certainty post Brexit.

There are two issues that the Bill does not cover, quite understandably, but that are worth discussing. First, nuclear technology, materials and engineers need to be able to move freely, so we must achieve a quick and lasting agreement with other countries. Our nuclear programme is international, and we must recognise that

[James Heapey]

in the arrangements that we make. I have every confidence that we will, and that the countries with which we seek to work will warmly welcome our approaches.

Secondly, there is the matter of funding for research and development. As we decarbonise our heating and transport systems, our demand for electricity will rise sharply. Renewables and our new nuclear programme are the answer for now, but the prize that we have all been looking for, for half a century, is fusion power. That has been eight to 15 years away for a very long time, and quite possibly it is still eight to 15 years away. When the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change went to the United States last year, however, it was clear that progress is starting to be made quickly on that side of the Atlantic. When we returned home, we were pleased to find after further inquiries that progress on this side of the Atlantic has been even quicker still. The UK, with our European partners, is ahead on the matter. It is absolutely vital that the Government commit, as they have done, to continuing to fund the research and development of fusion power. The opportunities are huge, and it is a prize on which the Government should keep their eyes.

In conclusion, I absolutely understand the concerns that nuclear industry representatives have raised with me, and I understand why they want certainty. They work in an industry in which there is absolutely no appetite or tolerance for risk, so it is entirely understandable that they seek the certainty of continued membership of Euratom. They should be reassured that the Government's first preference is associate membership of Euratom, as a result of which nothing would change. If that is not possible, how prudent it is for the Government to seek, at the very first opportunity, to legislate to provide a contingency to assure the UK nuclear industry that safeguarding regulations are firmly in hand. Those regulations will be familiar to the industry, because they will look remarkably similar to the ones that we have now.

8.54 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I rise to support the Bill, unsurprisingly, because as colleagues well know, the decision to leave the European Union also meant, by extension, a decision to leave Euratom. This issue has been debated on the Floor of the House, but that is the position of both the UK Government and the EU27. The Government have therefore made it clear that they intend to honour their commitment to the International Atomic Energy Agency by setting up a domestic safeguarding regime. The regime will ensure that there is no interruption to the British civil nuclear industry and, indeed, that the production of nuclear energy and the various other workings enabled by Euratom will continue without pause.

It would be unacceptable for the UK not to have a safeguarding regime in place on its exit from the European Union. Although it is absolutely appropriate for colleagues and Opposition Members to scrutinise and perhaps amend the Bill during its passage, it would be foolhardy in the extreme—in fact, deeply inappropriate—to try in any way to prevent it from ultimately making its way through the House. That is why I am very pleased that the Labour party made it clear, after what I must say

was an elegant period of anticipation-building delay by the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey)—she teased us about the position of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition until the ultimate line of her speech—that it will let the Bill progress, so that any such concerns are alleviated.

I have listened with interest to a number of speeches—no, to them all—and I was particularly exercised by some of the points made in interventions by SNP Members. As I said in an intervention and will now repeat—this has been highlighted by the Nuclear Industry Association, on its Twitter feed during the debate—there is not just a semantic difference but a fundamental difference between nuclear safeguarding and nuclear safety. I will give SNP Members the benefit of the doubt and say that the subtlety of that difference was perhaps lost on them, because the alternative assumption I would have to make is that they intentionally blurred the distinction between the two to scare the British people on what this is about, and I am certain that they would not do so intentionally.

SNP Members also placed great store on the supposed risks to medical radioisotopes. Again, I took the time, while keeping one ear on the speeches, to look at the briefing paper from the Nuclear Industry Association that they mentioned. It makes reference to concerns about radioisotopes, but when I followed the links I found a circuit of links using basically the same phrase on the concern about five radioisotopes. I finally got to what I think was the end of the chain, and I discovered that, in response to the squeezing of the supply of medical radioisotopes, Euratom and other agencies had set up the European Observatory on the Supply of Medical Radioisotopes. That body has worked in the intervening years to ensure that there is a timely supply of medical radioisotopes. That goes to the heart of showing that the concerns raised—again, inadvertently, I suspect—by SNP Members and others about the diagnostic ability of the NHS somehow being compromised by a lack of radioisotopes is in fact a fallacy.

Drew Hendry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Cleverly: No, I will not give way, because a number of Members still wish to speak. I apologise; I would normally give way, but I am about to conclude because I know we are short of time.

The Bill will give the Office for Nuclear Regulation additional powers. It will give the Government the opportunity to use limited powers to amend the Nuclear Safeguards and Electricity (Finance) Act 1978, the Nuclear Safeguards Act 2000 and the Nuclear Safeguards (Notification) Regulations 2004, so that references in legislation to existing international agreements can be updated. I appreciate that Opposition Front Benchers have concerns about that, but it strikes me as a remarkably pragmatic attempt to get important business through the House in a timely manner, so that our important nuclear industries are not compromised. I commend the measure to the House.

9 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): My only regret in speaking is that, given the constraints on our time, you have imposed a six-minute limit on our speeches, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I feel that I could speak for a long time on the important subject of our debate.

The Bill is precisely the sort of responsible measure that a good, decent, forward-looking Government would introduce to avoid the cliff edge that we are told is a problem with so-called hard Brexit. The debate is serious, but the Opposition are clearly not taking it seriously. I am disappointed that so few of our Opposition colleagues participated. I am surprised that we have had a string of Conservative speakers, without even a bat squeak from the Opposition in response.

From the speeches of members of the Opposition parties, one would think that we faced disaster if we left Euratom. We will not face disaster precisely because of the Bill. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) quoted a nuclear expert and used the phrase, to which he did not return, “without alternative arrangements”. That is key. The expert said that, if we left Euratom “without alternative arrangements”, there would be a problem, but the whole point of the Bill is to set up those alternative arrangements, without which we would face a more difficult situation. The hon. Gentleman could not have made a more ridiculous point.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to respond. Does he accept that the industry would prefer to stay in Euratom or have an associate membership to “alternative arrangements”?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been listening to the debate with rapt attention, and he will have noticed in the course of several hours of discussion that we are leaving Euratom because, if he remembers, we voted to leave the EU last year. It was not the British Government who said we had to leave Euratom, but the Commission. The EU itself said that, as a consequence of voting to leave the EU, we had to leave Euratom, and we have taken it at its word. Perhaps we should not have done; perhaps the hon. Gentleman has intelligence that we do not possess, but we took it at its word and, consequently, it is quite proper to seek, through the Bill, to provide the “alternative arrangements” that industry experts have suggested are necessary to smooth the transition process.

I also wish to point out how depressingly gloomy a lot of the SNP’s language has been. We have been told that we are useless negotiators and that the state of Britain’s diplomacy is woefully inadequate. We have been told all sorts of things about how bad things are going, and of course nothing could be further from the truth. It is a complete fantasy. In fact, our diplomacy is widely respected throughout the world. We have a highly effective, well trained force and a disciplined, professional cadre of people. It is nauseating to hear SNP Members decry and denigrate our civil service in that way, and it is indicative of their lack of seriousness that only two Members from that particular party are gracing us with their presence in the Chamber.

With a couple of minutes to spare, I want to talk briefly about Britain’s traditions in nuclear power. I know it was uncomfortable to hear, but my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was right that we are leaving Euratom at a moment when the countries of Europe, such as Germany, Italy and even Austria, are retreating from civil nuclear power. It is not something they want in their energy mix. The response of the German Chancellor to the Fukushima disaster in 2011 was to suggest that Germany would not pursue nuclear power and would shut down its nuclear

power plants. Indeed, it is revealing that Frau Merkel is now in conversation with the Green party in Germany. Her coalition is dependent on Green party co-operation, and those of us who follow these things will know that the Green party is singularly opposed to nuclear power. It is the one thing that will not happen if it enters the Government in Germany, once the Government have been constituted, so there is no way that the Germans will develop this line of research. Similarly, we understand that Austria has banned the transfer of nuclear material.

Drew Hendry: The hon. Gentleman rightly points out where he disagrees with politicians of other places or has criticisms of them, but will he withdraw his earlier remark about the SNP criticising civil servants, which we have never done? All we have done is criticise the failure of this Government.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Forgive me, but one of the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues mentioned—we can all look at *Hansard* tomorrow—that our diplomacy was being ridiculed and was somehow deficient. If someone says that diplomacy is deficient, they are criticising the diplomats who are conducting that diplomacy, and I am afraid that most of those diplomats are indeed civil servants, so that was criticism of our civil servants, with no cause whatever—it was just a form of abuse. I know that SNP Members get caught up in their rhetorical exercises and like to make a big splash in the House of Commons, but I thought that was completely unnecessary.

Lastly, when it comes to freedom of access and foreign scientists and nuclear power experts coming to Britain, there is no country that is more open, from the academic point of view, to foreign talent and ingenuity than Great Britain. We have dozens of Nobel prize winners, many of whom came from outside the United Kingdom. We also have a great record in practical science and in businesses that have developed from the fruits of that practical science, so again this scaremongering and project fear is completely misplaced. I suggest to those hon. Members that they just move on.

9.9 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the many thoughtful and informed speeches we have heard this evening, and it is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), who speaks with great passion on these matters—and always manages to do so without many notes, which I for one find very impressive.

I am regularly asked by constituents what progress is being made on Brexit, and tonight’s Bill represents perhaps our first substantive policy debate at Second Reading on an issue that matters to our constituents on a day-to-day basis as we chart our exit from the EU. It is disappointing, therefore, after all the bluster at the start of the debate, when Labour Members had a lot to say for themselves, that we have such barren Benches opposite now. I would be happy to take an intervention from one of them on this important issue, but unfortunately they are not here.

This issue affects all our constituents. The civil nuclear industry is very important and affects every person in the country. It is relevant to keeping the lights on and to the jobs of thousands of people directly employed in the nuclear sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) was right to highlight how this

[Tom Pursglove]

was not just an abstract issue but one that affected people's lives and livelihoods. It is also relevant, however, in the context of supply chains—tons of steel is used in nuclear projects, for example. We should not forget, therefore, that this affects not only jobs directly involved in the industry but many jobs throughout the supply chain.

I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said during his remarks. I thought he put his case eloquently and set out his rationale brilliantly. I noted down a few of the key points he raised. The first was that we had to go down this route because of the article 50 requirements. That is very simple. Opposition Members are often keen to cosy up to the European Commission, and often think the Commission is absolutely right, so I have to ask myself why they do not believe it on this occasion. The position has been made very clear, by both the UK Government and the Commission, so perhaps Opposition Members need to go away and have a look at that.

I was also pleased to hear that we must and will live up to our obligations, as we would all expect. Of course, businesses and the sector want as much certainty and continuity as possible, and that is exactly what the Bill seeks to achieve. It is also possible to deliver the benefits of Euratom membership through other means. We want to continue to adhere to the standards set down and therefore we fully support their replication. My constituents would expect us to replicate them. We hear about lots of different policy areas in the House—international trade, for example. What point would there be in our watering down the standards we adhere to at present? I have heard no logical argument for why we as a country would want to do that. It just is not in our interests as we look to go out into the world and make a success of Brexit. It is also in our national interest to have sensible strategic co-operation into the future. It is the responsible, right and logical thing to do. That good will was demonstrated by the commitment to underwrite the UK's share of the EU joint European torus project.

The Bill will ensure that the UK continues to meet its international obligations on nuclear safeguards as they apply to civil nuclear material through the International Atomic Energy Agency; to maintain the UK's reputation as a responsible nuclear state that supports international nuclear non-proliferation; and to protect UK electricity supplied by nuclear power. Who could argue with any of that? The Bill is one of contingency, certainty and reassurance, so I am surprised that the Opposition are not more enthusiastic, not least because we so frequently hear from them about how we are not making sufficient progress. When we try to make progress, they criticise us for it. It makes no sense. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot continue using such issues—important technical issues—as a proxy for something else.

It was very disappointing to hear the reckless scaremongering about isotopes for medical uses. People will have heard those claims and been concerned. We should not do that. The House has a responsibility to be honest. We need to be truthful about the issue, and I am very pleased that the Secretary of State was able to provide the reassurance that people sought.

Let us not forget that there is still a very long way to go in the negotiations that lie ahead of us. I believe that we have a great deal to offer as a country in relation

to nuclear. We lead on research, we lead on innovation and we lead on science, so we bring a lot to the table. As I have said, there is a long way to go in the negotiations; let us see what can be agreed.

9.15 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): It is, perhaps, less pleasurable than it should be to follow so many of my colleagues, because it means that no one on the Opposition Benches is bothering to speak, which is very disappointing. [HON. MEMBERS: "There are some Scottish National party Members here."] You guys are very committed: well done.

It is absolutely understandable that there is concern about the approach that the United Kingdom will take to nuclear safeguarding when we leave the European Union and Euratom in 2019. That is why the Bill is so important. It is about ensuring that we maintain our current high standard of safeguarding, and ensuring that the Government are able to develop any future obligations that are placed on the UK by the international community.

The hysteria with which the Bill has been met by Opposition Members is bemusing. They seem adamant and convinced that the Government plan to rip up all their international obligations post-Brexit, although what is on paper in the Bill is the exact opposite: it represents a commitment to continuity, and is vital to our wider negotiating position in Europe. As for the concerns raised about the industry itself, there is absolutely no reason why new and possibly more favourable trade agreements cannot be struck with the countries that supply the UK once we leave the EU. In talks with the Government, many of those nations have been effusive about establishing post-Brexit trade deals. This summer the Prime Minister secured a pledge from Japan, which currently supplies Oldbury nuclear power station, to commit itself to a trade deal when Britain leaves the EU.

Given those positive soundings, I think that the move away from the EU has the potential to spawn more fruitful international relationships for the UK nuclear industry. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) made it clear that the EU's interest in nuclear power is waning. Countries are rowing back on their nuclear commitments, setting time limits on when they want to get out of nuclear power, so perhaps we are better off out of it.

It cannot be denied that the EU's support for research and development in this field has been instrumental in driving innovation. As Opposition Members have been keen to point out, we have received money and support from the EU, but they often forget that it does not come free of charge, and that we pay for our membership of that club.

Chris Green: Does my hon. Friend agree that as we look towards moving from Horizon 2020 to framework programme 9, there is a strong possibility that the European Union will emphasise a move away from cutting-edge research to capacity building? Will that not cause us a problem?

Ben Bradley: I entirely agree. It is vital for us to be able to safeguard our national interests and the skills that we have in great numbers, so that we can support the industry and continue to go from strength to strength in the UK, regardless of what the Germans tell us we should be doing.

The Joint European Torus programme in Oxfordshire is a key example of the positive support that we have received. The Government have pledged to underwrite the UK's share of the cost of the project until 2020 to meet our international obligations and ensure the success of the project. The same applies to Horizon 2020. That willingness to participate in such projects is a clear indication that the UK will not turn its back on commitments with the EU at the expense of scientific progress. The desire to support the sciences domestically will also filter down into immigration policy. The Government have already made it clear that they are keen for the brightest and best people from the world of science to continue to come and work in the UK, and that is not going to change.

The simple fact is that the UK is leaving the EU and, necessarily, Euratom. The European Commission has made that pretty clear. There can be no watered-down half-membership, as Euratom comes with commitments to the European courts and free movement that my constituents would never go for. While the Bill does raise questions about the future of the nuclear industry—all things are uncertain when it comes to a huge negotiation on the scale of Brexit—it is clear that its intention is to promote continuity and ensure that Britain's high standards of nuclear safeguarding are maintained after we leave. It is a vital contingency plan to ensure that if we do end up with no deal—which no one wants, blah blah blah—[*Laughter*]*—*we are ready for that eventuality. That was not meant as a “filler”, but there is no point in going over the same old argument again.

As many of my colleagues have said over many months, we are leaving the EU. That is right and necessary, and it has to be a clean break, but we are not leaving Europe, and we want to continue to co-operate on many aspects that are beneficial to the UK.

It appears that the Opposition are not even going to vote against the Bill. They are playing a dangerous political game with an important decision—talking about the nuclear Armageddon that will inevitably come from the passing of the Bill yet not bothering to vote against it. I am not quite sure where they are coming from. It seemed clear even from the opening statement from the shadow Front Bench that this is not about the content of the Bill; it is an attempt to refight the referendum over and over again, and to talk about how they did not want to leave the EU at all.

The scaremongering about how this might affect medical isotopes or safety and numerous other aspects during the lengthy discussion of this Bill bears no resemblance to what is down on paper. The Bill is about delivering continuity for the industry in the UK and giving us the opportunity to forge ahead in this field in the future.

9.20 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), and to be called to participate in this fascinating and wide-ranging debate. We have heard tonight about gramophones, “Dr Strangelove”, beefing up, belts and braces, “blah blah blah”, and the “neverendum”, but we did hear a lot of sense in the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and for Copeland (Trudy Harrison).

Security of our energy is paramount—on a daily basis in our lives, for every one of us in our hospitals and schools, and in terms of our daily safety. Securing the position of the UK as an international nuclear state is therefore vital as we pave our way out of the EU.

As we heard from the Secretary of State at the start of the debate, this is a simple and prudent Bill whose message is timely. This evening, the fact that the Government are actively working through this Bill to ensure that the UK continues to meet our international obligations for nuclear safeguards while also continuing the UK's reputation as a responsible nuclear state has been warmly welcomed. Let us be clear: the UK will continue to support Euratom, and in the meantime we will seek, through this Bill, continuity on co-operation and standards.

I believe the Bill will bolster the roles and responsibilities of the UK's existing nuclear regulator, the Office for Nuclear Regulation, once we leave Euratom. Despite “Project Fear”, which we have heard a lot about tonight, the collaboration between scientists and those in the nuclear sector is vitally important to all aspects of our co-operation. The Government want, and, more importantly, intend, to see this continue. It is clear at the outset that the industrial strategy includes nuclear and supports the scientific community through this, and builds on that through Brexit. While the Opposition refuse to accept the public's decision to leave the European Union, the Government continue to get on with the job of ensuring a responsible withdrawal.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is highly appropriate that this should be the first piece of oven-ready Brexit legislation, as that shows the importance of this industry and of safeguards in it?

Mims Davies: So we can add “oven-ready” to “boil in the bag” Brexit, perhaps; yes, it is the latest example of that important vote. As we heard this evening from my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), what we are doing as we leave the EU really matters in terms of the message we give to our constituents. Those on both sides of the argument are seeing us preparing for what is going to happen.

Let us make no mistake about this: the Opposition have no care for the nuclear industry, they do not support the vital role that it plays within our energy mix, and they do not respect the jobs and communities that rely on it. We heard that this evening from my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland: in an excellent and rounded speech on the industry and what it means to her constituency, we heard a lot about what the impact on her community would be if we got this wrong, and that applies across the UK. In stark contrast to the Opposition, the Government stand ready to take up the important role of protecting our world-leading nuclear industry during and before Brexit, so we can enable the UK to continue to meet its international nuclear obligations as it leaves Euratom.

I will therefore be strongly supporting this Bill this evening, and hope that all Opposition Members will follow Conservatives in doing so.

9.24 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). The *Hansard* editors will now have to work out how to spell “blah blah blah” as well as “blah-di-blah”.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

I am a natural optimist, but if the House will allow me I want to strike a slightly cautionary note at the beginning of my speech. Leaving the European Union was always going to be difficult. We have been members of the EU, and of Euratom, for 44 years and these are some of the complexities that we will have to deal with over the coming years if we are to make a success of leaving the European Union. Additionally, the European Union was always going to be difficult about this because it does not want us to leave. The negotiations will be difficult. It is also quite clear from their recent remarks that most Opposition Members—not many of whom are present at this time of the evening—are going to be difficult and try to frustrate the process.

However, difficult and impossible are two different things. I believe that the Prime Minister is taking the right approach in her negotiations with the European Union. On the one hand, she made a conciliatory and generous speech in Florence in setting out the terms that we were prepared to work on; on the other hand, she has stated clearly and quite rightly that we will prepare for no deal. The Bill is about preparing for no deal on Euratom, although Members across the House clearly want us to strike such a deal. It is no wonder that the Opposition do not think that this is necessary. We know from the shadow Chancellor's comments yesterday on "The Andrew Marr Show" that Labour would not accept no deal in any circumstances. That means that they would accept the worst possible deal if that was the only deal on the table. It was also made clear in Labour's manifesto that it would accept the worst possible deal rather than walk away with no deal. That is the most naive negotiating stance I have ever heard of. The shadow Business Secretary must agree that that is not the right approach to take in any negotiations.

It is absolutely right that we should make provision in the Bill for the nuclear industry, which is very important for the UK's economy and for our energy needs. Nuclear already supplies around 21% of our electricity, and that will grow to around 42% by 2050. As some Members will know, I have shale gas in my constituency and I am often lobbied by shale gas protesters who say that we do not have an appropriate policy on energy and renewables. I want to pay tribute to the strategic approach that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is taking to meeting the energy needs of this country. We absolutely have a future in renewables, and nuclear will play a key part in that.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is also about building public confidence, and that developing civil nuclear power is separate from anything being used for military purposes? That is why these safeguards are absolutely right. They make it clear that civil nuclear is completely separate from any other objectives.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Civil nuclear is a key part of our energy requirements and, in turn, of our economy.

It might surprise Members—and certainly members of the wider public—to learn that the UK is the third best performing nation on the planet in the international climate change performance index. We are ahead of every country you could name apart from France and

Germany. We have a strategic policy around nuclear and renewables that will continue to put this country at the forefront of the green energy industry. We are also investing in other important areas in relation to nuclear power.

The Minister recently said that the Government would continue to support the Taurus fusion project. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey) said, the future capability of fusion has been talked about for some time. Indeed, when I was studying physics at Sheffield Polytechnic, which is now Sheffield Hallam University, a limitless supply of clean energy from fusion was talked about as the future. The nuclear industry of course also provides many jobs in the supply chain. My constituency—the bucolic rural idyll of Thirsk and Malton—has James Fisher Nuclear, the Derwent Training Association, which trains new generations of engineers for the sector, and many other such jobs.

All the Bill does is add a safeguarding responsibility to the safety responsibilities of the Office for Nuclear Regulation to ensure that we make good on our commitments under non-proliferation treaties. It will also implement our voluntary commitments with the IAEA. People may ask, "Can the UK have its own policy? Will it be too difficult for the UK to manage its own nuclear responsibilities or put the necessary regulations in place?" Clearly not. The Euratom countries obviously use that body to look after its nuclear interests, but most other countries do that independently. The UK has a long history of nuclear energy dating back to 1956, so we clearly have the experience and knowledge. We can, if necessary, place the current Euratom provisions under the Office for Nuclear Regulation to continue the quality, safe and robust regulations that we have been used to in this country. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.31 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I may be the last speaker before the wind-ups, but it is none the less a pleasure to contribute to this debate and to follow the eloquent speeches and learned contributions that we have heard. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey) spoke with such knowledge of the nuclear industry—far more than many of us.

This afternoon has demonstrated the importance of the nuclear industry, which we should not underestimate in our deliberations. Not only is it important to the UK economy, to jobs and the local supply chain and to our nation's security, but at its heart is the security of the UK's energy supplies. As we have heard, the UK's first commercial nuclear power station opened back in 1956. Today, 15 reactors generate a not insignificant 21% of our electricity, so nuclear is a vital source of energy in the UK. Aside from power stations, the civilian uses of nuclear materials extend to medicine, farming, transport and other industrial processes. Nuclear is a key strategic industry that affects us all, including each and every one of my constituents. This Government's commitment to electric vehicles means that nuclear will have a further strategic importance in the UK. As someone whose household has recently purchased its first electric vehicle, we have an added interest in this field, including in making note of where the UK's charging points are and are not.

However, this is a serious, specific debate about safeguards. It is not, as we have heard, about safety. The Bill was first announced in the Queen's Speech to establish a UK nuclear safeguards regime as we leave the EU and Euratom, ensuring that the UK continues to meet international standards for nuclear safeguards while—this is important—continuing the UK's reputation as a responsible nuclear state.

In this place we are understandably focused on Brexit. We are ensuring that we get the best deal for our country in the withdrawal process, and the Bill is a key part of that process. We often talk about the need to maintain stability and avoid the cliff edge we hear about as we exit the EU, and this is a prime example of legislation that is about preparedness and doing the ground work in readiness for when we leave the EU.

The Government have made it clear that future safeguard arrangements will continue to provide the safety, quality and robustness that currently exist under Euratom. The Secretary of State set out clearly that the EU and Euratom are uniquely legally joined, to which some Opposition Members take exception, and it means that when we formally notified the EU of our intention to leave, we also commenced the process of leaving Euratom.

Put simply, this contingency Bill is intrinsically and uniquely linked to the result of the referendum on 23 June 2016. I will be voting for the Bill this evening. My constituents and the country voted in the referendum, and we voted to leave the EU. The Bill will help ensure that the UK remains committed to having nuclear safeguards by enabling the UK to set up a domestic safeguard regime so that we continue to meet international safeguard and nuclear non-proliferation standards.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) said, this is a responsible Bill from a responsible Government who are delivering a responsible Brexit.

9.36 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) struck the right note when she said this is a serious debate. We have to discuss these issues with due seriousness, and my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) clearly set out our serious concerns about the Bill in her opening contribution.

The Bill should be unnecessary, and the Opposition hope it may yet be so. What the Government should be doing is setting their goal as the UK's continued participation in Euratom as a member, if possible, or as close to that relationship as we can get. There is a lot of cross-party agreement on that goal—I exempt the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), who extravagantly celebrated our crashing out of Euratom—but in the Westminster Hall debate on the issue back in July, ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), who is a champion of this sector, even the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who was here earlier and who is not a noted dove on these issues, said that we should be working “towards something like associate membership.”—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2017; Vol. 627, c. 96WH.]

It appeared then that the barrier to that relationship was the role of the European Court of Justice, as the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) pointed out. Indeed, the former chief of staff to the

Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and the former Chancellor of the Exchequer have both suggested that that is why Euratom was linked to the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017, and the responsibility for that lies with the Prime Minister. It is deeply irresponsible to put our nuclear industry at risk because of a reckless and ideological decision to make the future role of the ECJ a red line in all matters relating to Brexit.

As hon. Members have pointed out, and as the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said in his opening remarks, the Bill provides for safeguarding arrangements for all civilian nuclear facilities in the UK, which is clearly needed if we leave Euratom, but that is only one part of what is at risk. The wider issues were exercised in the Government's own position paper, which was issued over the summer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) pointed out, Euratom oversees the transport of nuclear fuel across the EU and enables vital co-operation on information, infrastructure and funding of nuclear energy. It is the legal owner of all nuclear material, and the legal purchaser, certifier and guarantor of any nuclear materials and technologies that the UK purchases. That includes, for example, our nuclear trade with the United States.

Euratom has helped us become a world leader in nuclear research and development. In their position paper on the issue, the Government rightly said that they want a “close and working relationship” with Euratom, and we welcome that. That position paper set out six high-level principles for nuclear materials and safeguards that would frame their approach to the issue. So may I ask the Minister to explain why the Bill fails to address five of those six high-level principles, which are the Government's own objectives?

Why is the Bill so limited in its scope? Is that because the Government aim to secure ongoing membership and have just brought this Bill forward as a contingency? Will the Minister confirm the answer that I understood the Secretary of State to give to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill): that it is the Government's intention to seek associate membership? Is it because their thinking has not advanced sufficiently on all the other issues connected with our membership of Euratom? Or is it, as was said by some of the more excitable Conservative Members, such as the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), that they are looking forward to crashing out of Euratom—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps “excitable” was not quite the right word, but he was working towards it. Given that the Prime Minister has talked it up, will the Minister say what work has been done on a no-deal scenario in the event that we leave Euratom in the way that some Conservative Members would seem to like?

Tom Pursglove: Is not the whole purpose of a Bill such as this to stop anybody crashing out? The hon. Gentleman is using totally irresponsible language.

Paul Blomfield: I agree that it is irresponsible language and I am sorry to have heard it from some Conservative Members during this debate.

This is an important issue and the sector is hugely important, as the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) pointed out in a thoughtful and informed contribution when she said that it is important that we

[Paul Blomfield]

get this right. The Government therefore need to answer some key questions. The ONR cannot exercise these new powers until it has a voluntary offer agreement and additional protocol from the IAEA for a UK safeguards regime. What work has been done on that and when do the Government anticipate that will be ratified? What have the Government done to ensure that the ONR has the necessary skills to take on the safeguarding of nuclear material? Euratom employs 160 people on safeguarding, 25% of whom work on UK installations, whereas the ONR currently employs eight staff. I understand that it takes five years to train a nuclear safeguards inspector. Two years will not be long enough to reskill the necessary number of inspectors. Are plans under way to re-employ the current Euratom officials or do the Government have another contingency up their sleeve?

Dr Drew: The problem is that the nuclear industry is not currently able to call on that level of expertise. It already suffers because of a shortage of labour in many parts of the industry, so that can only get worse.

Paul Blomfield: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, which I am coming straight to. As a number of Members have mentioned, it is planned to halve the current Government grant to the ONR by 2020. I recognise that this is only one part of the ONR's funding, but can the Minister confirm that that is no longer the Government's intention? Will he outline what their new funding plans would be, given the additional responsibilities they are seeking to place on the ONR?

An important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), and echoed by some others, was that outside Euratom the Government would have to negotiate individual nuclear collaboration agreements not simply with Euratom, but with every country outside of the EU with which we currently co-operate through our membership, including the US, China, Canada, Australia, Kazakhstan and South Korea. The right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) mentioned the example of the United States. A section 123 agreement with the US—a legal necessity if we are to trade nuclear goods with the US—would have to go through the Senate and the House of Representatives, with final sign-off needed from the President. Does the Minister really believe it is possible to achieve that in the time we have left?

What provisions have been put in place to ensure that normal business in the UK is not disrupted? As the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) pointed out, an important part of that will be ensuring that the UK has the right skills to build, operate and decommission nuclear power stations. What will be the Government's migration policy for the nuclear worker who previously enjoyed free movement under the provision of the Euratom treaty?

A key benefit of the UK's involvement in Euratom has been our participation in R and D programmes. The Government have given limited commitments on Culham, but what are their wider intentions on the full Euratom work programme from 2019-20 onward?

Seventeen months does not give us much time to resolve such a huge number of issues. The paralysis at the heart of the negotiations, created by the divisions at the heart of the Government, do not give us much

confidence that the issues can be resolved within the time available. One further key question: will the Government seek to continue membership of Euratom—or to come to an arrangement that replicates the benefits and responsibilities of that membership—for a transitional period after we leave the EU in March 2019?

The Bill is inadequate. It fails to address so many of the vital questions that the Government themselves raised in their own position paper. It gives the Secretary of State powers to amend legislation without reference to the House—powers that, although narrower in scope, in many ways go further than those in the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. For these reasons, we cannot support it. Nevertheless, we recognise that, if the worst comes to the worst—as some Government Members seem to anticipate—and we crash out without agreement, we would be in breach of our international responsibilities under the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons if we do not have a safeguarding regime in place. For that reason, we will seek to amend the Bill significantly in Committee, but we will not oppose it tonight.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I apologise, Mr Speaker, because I nearly called you Madam Deputy Speaker. I turned around and you were there, and I feel a lot better knowing that you are at the helm.

I have listened carefully to the arguments in this debate about our country's future nuclear safeguards regime. I thank Members from all parties for their contributions, but particularly my right hon. and hon. Friends, so many of whom spoke. I am encouraged by the general consensus in the House on one fundamental point: the UK nuclear industry and nuclear research community—both of which have an excellent global reputation—are key assets and must be supported. I promise that we will do nothing to endanger that.

Regardless of where Members stand on membership, associate membership, transition or departure from Euratom—people have used various pronunciations today—I hope we can all agree that it is sensible and prudent to take the powers contained in the Bill, as they are necessary to set up our domestic nuclear safeguards regime. However, there has been a lot of scaremongering—that word has been used. I hope that Opposition Members did not intend to frighten people unnecessarily with certain comments, because I would have to call that “Project Fear”.

I can state categorically that, first, the Bill is nothing to do with medical isotopes and fissile materials are excluded; secondly, we are not going to crash out with no arrangements; and thirdly, important though nuclear safety is, it is nothing to do with nuclear safeguards. The Bill is the Nuclear Safeguards Bill. We have consistently repeated that, but unfortunately—[*Interruption.*] I was going to say that unfortunately the shadow Minister is nodding, but I know he is nodding because he knows. Other Members, particularly those on the SNP Benches, have confused the two.

On the triggering of article 50—this has been mentioned several times—the European Commission stated very clearly to the European Parliament:

“It is recalled that in accordance with Article 106(a) of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union applies also to the European Atomic Energy Community.”

Given that article 50 has been triggered and that the European Commission has said that that was the right decision, we believe that it is absolutely essential that we have a constructive and co-operative relationship with our European partners.

Rachel Reeves *rose*—

Richard Harrington: I would love to give way to the Chair of the BEIS Select Committee, but I have very little time. I do hope that she will understand—*[Interruption.]* Oh, all right.

Rachel Reeves: What a gentleman! Thank you very much.

The Minister is setting out two alternatives: the ONR taking responsibility or our staying in Euratom. However, there is a third way forward—a third way—which is to seek a transition period in which we remain in Euratom and then go for some sort of associate membership of Euratom. Are the Government exploring that opportunity, which would best serve our industry and those jobs?

Richard Harrington: Well, I do know that the Chair of the Select Committee is a well-known Blairite, but actually to quote Mr Blair is very impressive. We leave Euratom at the same time as we leave the European Union.

Rachel Reeves *rose*—

Richard Harrington: I really must make some progress.

As we have heard, there are other issues of great importance, such as access to skilled workers and continued R and D collaboration, on which we are focused as we seek to establish our new relationship with Europe's nuclear community. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), asked me why those points are not included in the Bill. It was a fair question, but let me tell him that they are part of Euratom's activities that are subject to negotiation but do not require legislation.

I was not surprised to hear all of the concerns expressed today—I would be astonished if the House did not have concerns and questions given the novel circumstances that we now find ourselves in. No country has ever left the EU or Euratom before. Let me explain for the avoidance of doubt that this is not an alternative. This is not because we do not want to maintain our successful civil nuclear co-operation with Euratom. We must set our own nuclear safeguards regime. It would be irresponsible for us not to do so. We are using the body that already regulates nuclear security and safety—the ONR. The shadow Minister said that it has only eight suitable employees at the moment. That is why we are here today—we need to ensure that the Bill has all the provisions both in terms of IT and infrastructure, and we need to recruit all the necessary people. That is why we are taking the powers, why they are so important and why the Bill is so vital and deserves support from across the House. We want to have—and we will have—a domestic nuclear safeguards regime that will enable the UK to meet international safeguards and nuclear non-proliferation standards after we withdraw from Euratom.

The intention is for the new domestic regime to exceed the standard that the international community would expect from the UK as a member of the IAEA.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, we are aiming to establish a robust regime as comprehensive as that currently provided by Euratom.

Some hon. Members have asked why the Bill has been introduced and brought to its Second Reading so quickly—in fact, within a few days. That is because we know how important it is to have a nuclear safeguards regime for the UK. The ONR is key to that, and it needs the time to carry out both the recruitment and the planning. The international community, which we deal with all the time, wants to know that the safeguards regime will be established well before March 2019. I wish to thank EDF Energy, which is constructing our new Hinkley Point nuclear power station, and all of the other people in the nuclear industry, whom I briefed just before introducing this Bill last week, for their support in what we are doing here. The Bill is absolutely critical.

The Opposition have raised some issues about the powers in the Bill and the way in which we have approached the measures. The shadow Secretary of State said that there were too many delegated powers, Henry VIII provisions and all those sorts of thing. In fact, there is one Henry VIII power, which is limited and necessary because it enables us to alter references to the United Kingdom's agreements with the IAEA. We would not be able to license the inspectors, for example, without concluding these negotiations, which are currently trilateral between the UK, Euratom and the agency.

The bulk of discussions with the European Union are ongoing. We are exploring a number of options for smooth transition from the currently regime to a domestic one. The negotiations are going well. We have found a spirit of co-operation because the officials in Europe and ourselves have a big mutuality of interests, but we have to plan just in case suitable arrangements are not worked out. Shared interests are important and we know that we will provide the best possible basis for continued close co-operation with Euratom, although we cannot say exactly how that will be. It will be similar when we negotiate our bilateral nuclear co-operation agreements, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) made a rather excellent speech. He actually thanked me for harassing him in the Tea Room, which I will now always try to do. He mentioned the importance of and concerns about the bilateral nuclear co-operation agreements, which are already in place with several countries and will continue. My officials have been to the other countries concerned and I am certain that talks will progress well.

I am happy to meet the representative from the Royal College of Radiologists to discuss the concerns of the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran). I had hoped that I had reassured her, but I perfectly understand her point and am happy to meet the relevant people. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) made an excellent speech. The ONR has already started building processes and systems and recruiting inspectors, and the essential funding will be in place to do that.

I have heard many considered views from both sides of the House, but I hope that the House will unite in recognition of the special contribution of the nuclear industry. The Opposition have said that they will not vote against Second Reading, which is responsible, but I look forward to a lengthy and constructive discussion in

[Richard Harrington]

Committee and on Report. I can tell from the polite smiles from the Opposition Front Benchers that they will be raring to go and I welcome that. Quite apart from in Committee, I am happy to sit down and discuss the Bill with anybody on an individual basis. I am passionate about it because we really need this domestic nuclear safeguards regime, regulated by the regulator here. It should be as robust and comprehensive as that provided by Euratom or by any international operation. I am sorry that I have not been able to take every intervention, but my door is always open. I very much look forward to the remaining stages of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Business without Debate

NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Nuclear Safeguards Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 16 November 2017.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Nuclear Safeguards Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act of money so provided.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 17 October—

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 20 (Time for taking private business), the private business set down by the Chairman of Ways and Means may be entered upon at any hour (whether before, at or after 4.00pm) and may then be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of;

(2) notwithstanding sub-paragraph (2)(c), as applied by paragraph (4), of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), the backbench business set down for consideration may be entered upon at any hour, and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, after which the Speaker shall interrupt the business.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

COMMITTEES

Mr Speaker: We now come to motion 5 relating to the Backbench Business Committee, but I advise the House that there are several other motions up to and including motion 13. These matters fall within the auspices of the Chair of the Committee of Selection, who is in his place, looking eager and expectant and ready to move the motion. I trust that, with the leave of the House, we can take motions 5 to 13 together.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not the Chairman of the Committee of Selection for nothing. I meant that in the most positive way, but it is probably true in more ways than one.

Ordered,

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

That Robert Courts be a member of the Backbench Business Committee.

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE

That Vernon Coaker be a member of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Rehman Chishti be a member of the Home Affairs Committee.

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Bob Stewart be a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

That Damien Moore be a member of the Petitions Committee.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

That Vicky Ford, Adam Holloway and Stephanie Peacock be members of the Science and Technology Committee.

WELSH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Tonia Antoniazzi, Simon Hoare and Anna McMorrin be members of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

That Eddie Hughes be a member of the Women and Equalities Committee.

WORK AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

That Andrew Bowie, Jack Brereton and Chris Green be members of the Work and Pensions Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

Mr Speaker: We come now to the petition—*[Interruption.]* It is unaccountable and incomprehensible that Members do not wish to hear the presentation of the petition, given its likely content and the identity of its proposer, but if Members do insist on leaving the Chamber, I should be most grateful if they did so quickly and quietly, conducting their private conversations outside the Chamber rather than noisily in it. In fact, some of them are so absorbed in their noisy conversations that they are not even conscious that they are being advised not to conduct them, but I feel sure that those noisy Members are now departing the Chamber and we are immensely grateful to them.

PETITION

Law relating to travelling communities

10 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I do not want to detain the House for too long, but I rise to present a petition relating to the conduct of travelling communities in my constituency that, unfortunately, caused great damage over the course of this year. I want to put on the record my thanks to my colleagues, Councillors Ian Ward, Marje Bridle and John Cotton for how they handled the situation.

The terms of the petition, from constituents in the Shard End ward in my constituency, are self-explanatory. It states:

The petition of constituents of Hodge Hill,

Declares that we are blighted by the disruption of travelling communities repeatedly moving onto public green space and causing significant damage.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to change the law to allow instant eviction, rather than waiting the 48 hours now required by law.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002062]

National House Building Council

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

10.3 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): High on the list of priorities for many people in our country is the desire to own their own home. Indeed, a recent British social attitudes survey found that 86% of those asked said that they wanted to buy their own home. The UK has a long heritage of home ownership, which sets us up as different and distinct from many of our European neighbours. As the saying goes, an Englishman's home is his castle. I am sure that that is also true of the Scottish, the Welsh, the Irish and, indeed, the Cornish. It is in our culture that we value highly that little bit of the country that we own and call home.

There is no doubt that our country faces a huge challenge with the housing market. Demand, for all sorts of reasons, outstrips supply. The Government are right to encourage new house building—those houses need to be in the right places, through plan-led development, and they need the infrastructure and services to support them. There is no doubt, however, that we need to increase the supply of housing in our nation. I welcome the new extension of the Help to Buy scheme that will help first-time buyers to get on the property ladder and achieve the dream of owning their own home with only a 5% deposit. However, if we are to achieve the aim of building hundreds of thousands of houses that people will purchase and thus participate in our capitalist democracy, we need to ensure that they can be confident that those homes will be of a good quality in both design and construction.

While the majority of new homeowners are satisfied with the build quality, minor issues aside, figures from the Home Builders Federation and the National House Building Council show that a staggering 27% of buyers said that their homes had more problems than they were expecting. One national house builder recently saw its share value plummet by 10% on the news that it has set aside a staggering £7 million to resolve what have been described as “customer service problems”. With contracts signed, deadlines agreed, and maybe a chain involved, buyers have little or no option but to move into their new home, despite it sometimes not being finished to their satisfaction.

Often new homebuyers discover faults and poor workmanship that go way beyond reasonable, and even understandable, snagging. Some faults and problems are very serious indeed. So just when buyers are at their most vulnerable, too many discover serious building defects. No doubt when faults emerge, they look to the 10-year warranty almost universally offered on new homes. Several companies offer such products, but the market is dominated by the NHBC, which has roughly 80% of the market. In essence, for the first two years the builder is responsible for remedial works. If there is a dispute, then the warranty company will act as adjudicator, or if the builder is no longer trading, the warranty company steps in. After two years, the warranty company takes responsibility for the remaining eight years. The 10-year warranty is presented as a benefit and reassurance to the new homeowner.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about quite serious snagging problems, and slightly worse. Would he, like me, put more emphasis on getting those who produce neighbourhood plans to spend more time on making sure that the design is right rather than waiting for the buildings to be built and then people finding the snagging?

Steve Double: I agree that we need to put more attention into the design of the housing that we are building rather than just building to the usual design standards.

The experience of many is that when they take out the 10-year warranty, the insurers routinely resort to delay and obfuscation, denying and hindering legitimate claims for truly shocking examples of poor workmanship and defects or offering cost-cutting remedial works that fall short of producing a satisfactory solution.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem with many of the big house builders, such as the one he alluded to that set aside a large contingency fund for these issues, partly stems from the fact that they have no workforce of their own, particularly no site managers and the like? Interestingly, that company said recently that it would not support the levy continuing for the Construction Industry Training Board, which is having to be subsidised by architects and small builders, and not by the large house builders that we should arguably be holding more to account?

Steve Double: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention; she makes a very good point. At the heart of this problem is the quality control on building sites. Too often, subcontractors are used and there is not the level of management oversight of the quality of their workmanship that there has been in the past and that we need to see today.

I have been seeking to assist a couple in my constituency who had obvious and serious problems with their new-build house. They first discovered the serious defects with their newly built property eight weeks after taking possession. Four years later, they are still fighting their case. They purchased their brand new house for £395,000. The most recent estimate of the cost of rectifying all the faults and defects comes to £325,000. That is truly shocking, and it is surely a sign of the complete failure of the inspection regime. The level of defect is such that somebody must have known about the problems before completion.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Is he aware of an organisation in my constituency called Casa Snaggers? It is an independent snagging company based in Launceston. Does he think that it might help to resolve issues of the sort faced by the couple in St Austell?

Steve Double: I thank my hon. Friend and Cornish neighbour for that intervention. I have heard of that company, and getting an independent inspection of a new property before signing the completion papers is one way to address the issue.

Jo Churchill: Surely the fundamental point is that when someone spends nearly £400,000 on a product, they expect, under their consumer rights, that product

to be fit for purpose—a house should stand under its own construction and be there for the duration. We should be asking for that, rather than relying on a third-party snagging company.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I was alluding to the fact that in the current system, getting an independent view of the property is worthwhile. Long term, I do not think that that is the answer. We need to get to the point where a house purchaser can be confident in the quality of the housing that they are buying.

I return to the situation of the couple I have been assisting in my constituency. It transpires that similar defects have emerged on several other houses on the development, adding to the couple's anxiety and consternation. They said to me that far from being helped by the 10-year warranty company provider, they felt thwarted at every turn. They were sent around in circles and left for months on end with unhelpful responses or, indeed, no response at all. They said that far from working with them to resolve the matter, the warranty company appeared to be in cahoots with the developer. I believe that that is at the heart of the issue that I want to address. The perception is that NHBC has a too cosy relationship with the building companies, and lines are blurred as to precisely who they work for. That cannot be acceptable.

My own interaction with NHBC has been very unsatisfactory. I first became involved in the case before I was elected in 2015, and I have spent almost three years trying to assist progress, to very little avail—that is, until recently. It is notable that since notice of this debate was published, I have had direct and constructive contact from NHBC's chief executive, Steve Wood. He phoned me just last week and admitted that my constituents had been let down by the system. He said that he was determined not only to resolve their case, but to ensure that NHBC improved its service. Having spoken to Steve Wood, who has only been in post for three months, I am more hopeful that things may change for the better. However, although that response is welcome, an MP should not have to secure a debate in this House before the NHBC takes some action. New homeowners should be confident of getting the service they are entitled to without the intervention of their Member of Parliament.

Although I accept that many customers of NHBC will be satisfied with the service they have received, it is clear that far too many are being let down. Therefore, I believe that we need a review of the new homes warranty market. My constituents spoke to me of being thwarted and foiled at every turn, and that has proved to be a startlingly accurate description of the experience of other new homeowners across the country, as has recently been reported in the press.

One issue that has come to light is that NHBC has close ties with some developers, and that it operates a washout system of premium refunds. Once policies have expired, NHBC pays back to the builders a proportion of the fees paid for the policies—reportedly amounting to tens of millions of pounds—as a reward for, or in recognition of, a low or no-claims record. Between them, they have a vested, incestuous interest that is in conflict with the benefit and welfare of the very people they purport to act for—the homeowners. There is a

clear blurring of lines about whom the warranty company actually represents. The builder pays the premium, and if no claims are made, it gets a rebate. No wonder builders do all they can at times to avoid agreeing to a claim.

Jo Churchill: Is my hon. Friend aware of whether any statistics on this are collected by the Department so that it can understand which builders are particularly poor and allow planners or other people to get involved at an earlier point?

Steve Double: I am aware of what has been reported in the press, but I am sure that those data should be available, given the way in which the NHBC operates. That could certainly be followed up.

There appears to be a closed shop or old boys' network, with the industry looking after itself, rather than the consumer. By contrast, recent legislation has strengthened consumer rights further, so that faulty goods can be rejected and a full refund obtained, but not so with housing. Homes are specifically excluded from the Sale and Supply of Goods Act 1994. The homeowner has far more consumer rights and protection for a new kettle in their kitchen than they do for the new building that houses it. For the vast majority of people, buying a new home will be the biggest purchase they ever make, and surely we should provide more adequate protection for them. On the thankfully very rare occasions when the builder has completely failed to construct a property fit for habitation, house purchasers should not have to resort to the courts to establish their rights. Sadly, that is too often the case in the current set-up.

Building houses is high on the Government's agenda, and with plans for 1 million homes to be constructed, now is the time to ensure they are built well, are fit for purpose and consistently fulfil the reasonable expectations of those who buy them. When something goes wrong, there should also be a system in place to protect the purchaser. A recent report by the all-party group for excellence in the built environment made a number of recommendations. I urge the Minister to read the report and to consider its recommendations. As well as calling for a review of the warranty market, the all-party group also called for the introduction of an independent housing ombudsman.

Jo Churchill: I chair the all-party group, which for reasons of clarity, I thought I should declare.

Steve Double: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. I was not aware who the new chair was, and I am delighted to hear that it is my hon. Friend.

I believe the introduction of an independent ombudsman would be an important move, and I ask the Minister to consider it. By its very existence, an independent ombudsman would bring urgently needed fresh focus to the industry. As ever, it is far easier and cheaper to get it right first time. The prospect of an independent body adjudicating will in itself produce a new impetus to achieve a better outcome more often.

I look forward to the Minister's response. May I finish by inviting him to visit my constituency in Cornwall so that I can show him some of the problems that my constituents face and he can see them for himself?

His visit would be welcomed by exasperated homeowners and provide convincing further evidence of the need to bring fresh order to the industry.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Alok Sharma): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) on securing this debate on consumer protection for new home buyers and the National House Building Council. We have had some powerful interventions from colleagues, and I am extremely pleased that my hon. Friend has been working so hard to assist his constituents. It is good to know that the NHBC has now responded, and I wish him well in taking forward that individual case.

On house building in general, earlier this year we published our housing White Paper, which highlights the need to fix our broken housing market and sets out how we will tackle this. Of course, just building more new homes is not good enough. We expect all house builders to deliver good quality housing on time and to treat new house buyers fairly. My hon. Friend talked about homes being in the right place—I absolutely agree—and the important role that local people play in neighbourhood plans and deciding where development goes in an area.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, delivering good quality homes does not always happen in the sector. He referred to the Home Builders Federation survey, so perhaps I can elaborate and share some further statistics from it. The latest HBF survey concludes that 98% of new homeowners report problems to the builder. Of course, some will be snagging issues, but although some problems may be hard to prevent initially, 38% of buyers had more problems than they expected. A staggering 25% of buyers reported more than 16 problems. The latest survey shows that 84% of new homebuyers would recommend their builder to a friend. That figure has fallen steadily from 90% in the past four years. It means that 16% of new homebuyers do not think that they have a quality product. In any other market, that would spell the end of the most poorly performing companies. That has rarely been the case in the house building sector.

Customer satisfaction is important to many home builders, but others need to make it a priority. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) made a pertinent point when she talked about the vertical fragmentation of the industry. As I have said to some of the major house builders, perhaps the industry needs to think more about employing people directly so that they have much more control of the quality of what is built, as well looking at modern methods of construction.

After all, a home is not just one of the largest financial purchases, but one of the largest emotional commitments that people make. People bring up their families there, and it has treasured memories for many.

Alongside the actions the Government are taking, it is clear that home builders need to step up and make quality and design a priority. That includes ensuring that, where something goes wrong, house builders and warranty providers fulfil their obligations to put things right.

[Alok Sharma]

There are existing mechanisms for redress, such as the consumer code for home builders and the independent resolution service, but they can be complex, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay said, they do not always provide full coverage. As he also noted, most new builds are covered by a warranty provider such as the NHBC 10-year Buildmark warranty. However, as he said, the cover offered by warranty providers varies and does not always match consumer expectations.

The all-party parliamentary group for excellence in the built environment produced a report called “More homes, fewer complaints”. It made a series of recommendations to improve quality and redress. I have read the report and it is a very good piece of work, and we are seriously considering the points that have been raised.

I have been encouraged by the fact that the industry will respond formally to the APPG’s report. The HBF has set up a working group and it will take forward action to provide better information to customers, simplify the legal process and create a clearer and simpler process for signing off new homes as complete. As some Members will know, the new working group has commissioned an independent report on consumer redress for new homebuyers, which is due to be published in the coming weeks. We expect that the report will demonstrate that there are gaps in the current redress arrangements and perhaps suggest some remedies. I will review the independent report, with a view to ensuring that improved redress arrangements are introduced to provide greater protection to consumers on a broad range of issues, with a greater degree of independence from the industry. I have heard the calls for a new homes ombudsman, which have been repeated a number of times in the House over the past few weeks, and I can tell hon. Members that I am considering that option very seriously indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay also talked about design, as did other colleagues, and he is absolutely right: we need to improve the design quality of new build homes. The Government recognise that good design is an integral part of ensuring that we are building homes that people want to live in. We have put in place a robust framework that promotes and supports high-quality design. We want to create places, buildings and spaces that work well for everyone.

Jo Churchill: When my hon. Friend is considering design, will he also consider the space standards, which we have discussed before? It is important that families have homes that they can actually live in—that is, feed themselves in, relax in and then sleep in.

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes an important point about space standards and the fact that we need spaces in our homes to do all the things that we want to do as families. Houses in our country are generally much smaller than in some of our neighbouring countries in Europe, so she makes an important point.

I have talked about the importance of planning guidance and good design and about ensuring that advice on the planning processes and tools that local planning authorities can use to help to achieve that are in place. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), who has been a great champion of neighbourhood planning, talked about the importance of neighbourhood plans, which I think are incredibly important. We want to strengthen the national planning policy framework to introduce an expectation that local and neighbourhood plans and development plan documents should set out clear design expectations.

Last week I attended an event hosted by the Royal Institute of British Architects, which brought together a group of experts from across the housing industry and Government. The aim of the event was to underline the Government’s commitment to design and to provide the sector with an opportunity to share its ideas with us for taking forward our ambition to improve the design quality of homes and places.

In closing, I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay again for securing this valuable debate, for his ongoing contribution to consumer protection for his constituents and for making the case for other homebuyers. As I have said, the Government want to see more homes built quickly, but crucially I want that development to take place with the engagement of local communities and with a focus on high quality and design. We will continue to work with industry, communities, developers and all those with a clear interest in consumer protection of new homes to ensure that, as the quantity and quality of new homes increase, consumer protection increases also.

Question put and agreed to.

10.28 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 16 October 2017

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Homelessness

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I am today updating the House on a commitment I made during the passage of the Homelessness Reduction Act—the right hon. Member for Harrow East's (Bob Blackman) Private Member's Bill—to fund the additional duties contained within the Act in line with the new burdens doctrine. Following further discussions with local authorities on the new duties, the Government are providing an additional £11.7 million in new burdens funding, taking the total amount of new burdens funding from £61 million to £72.7 million.

The Government will provide £72.7 million to local authorities to meet the new burdens costs associated with the new duties contained within the Act over the course of the spending review. It is anticipated that the additional duties to prevent homelessness will lead to savings for local authorities thereafter.

I am also announcing the local authority allocations of the new burdens funding. The Government have worked with local authorities and the Local Government Association to test the methodology behind the distribution, as well as the core assumptions of the costs of administering the new duties. The distribution reflects the differing need in different authorities. The funding has been allocated according to a formula which reflects where resource pressures are likely to increase as a result of administering the new duties contained in the Act. The details of allocations and new burdens assessment are attached.

Today I am also launching a consultation on the Homelessness Code of Guidance which will support local authorities' work to prepare for the implementation of the Act. Additionally, Government will be providing local authorities with an equally distributed share of £3 million to support them in upgrading their data systems to monitor the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The Homelessness Reduction Act will significantly reform England's homelessness legislation and ensure that more people get the help they need to prevent and relieve homelessness. It forms part of the Government's end-to-end approach to tackling homelessness, helping both those at risk of homelessness and those experiencing a crisis. The new burdens funding for the Act sits alongside other funding for homelessness, including the £315 million homelessness prevention funding, our £50 million homelessness prevention package and the £402 million flexible homelessness support grant.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-10-16/HCWS176>.

[HCWS176]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council: October 2017

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker): My right hon. Friend Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I will be attending the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 17 October 2017 to represent the UK's interests. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

The provisional agenda includes:

Preparation of the European Council, 19 to 20 October 2017

The Estonian presidency will present its final draft conclusions on the agenda for the October European Council. The agenda includes: migration, digital, defence and external relations.

Rule of law dialogue

An annual rule of law dialogue has formed part of the GAC agenda since 2014. The presidency has invited Ministers to consider 'Media pluralism and the rule of law in the digital age' for this year's dialogue.

[HCWS172]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran Nuclear Deal)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): Her Majesty's Government have taken note of President Trump's decision not to recertify the joint comprehensive plan of action to Congress and, along with France, Germany and our other international partners, are concerned by the implications.

Her Majesty's Government are strongly committed to the Iran nuclear deal, known as the joint comprehensive plan of action or JCPoA. This deal represents the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy and was a major step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. The JCPoA contributes to the United Kingdom's wider non-proliferation objectives and strengthens the international framework in this regard.

The Government remain of the firm view that the deal is in the security interests of the United Kingdom and the wider region and is, most importantly, working to constrain Iran's nuclear ambitions. The International Atomic Energy Agency have released eight reports on Iran's nuclear programme since implementation day of the JCPoA in January 2016. In our role as a member of the Joint Commission, the body set up to implement the deal, consisting of the E3+3 (UK, France, Germany, China, Russia, US) and Iran, and co-ordinated by the European Union, we have held Iran to account and urged continued compliance. Where Iran has previously pushed the boundaries of the deal, it has taken steps to remain in compliance. The most recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency in August 2017 confirmed that Iran continues to comply with its nuclear related commitments under the JCPoA.

However, the Government share serious concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and its destabilising activity in the region. Addressing these issues is a fundamental part of the Government's policy towards Iran and we will consider further appropriate measures. The nuclear deal does not prevent us from tackling these issues. On the contrary, removing the most dangerous threat of nuclear weapons allows us to focus our efforts on challenging on the other areas of Iran's destabilising activity.

In parallel to agreeing the joint comprehensive plan of action in July 2015, Her Majesty's Government have been rebuilding bilateral relations with Iran in order to address issues of disagreement as well as discuss areas of agreement and co-operation. Both the United Kingdom and Iran reopened Embassies in London and Tehran in August 2015 and we upgraded to ambassadorial relations in September 2016. We remain very concerned about dual British- Iranian nationals who are detained in Iran and on whose cases we continue to press for improvement at the highest levels. Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have raised these cases personally with their Iranian counterparts and will continue to do so.

Her Majesty's Government continue to make the case for the JCPoA with its partners, including the United States, and are committed to ensuring its success in delivering both our security objectives and delivering sanctions relief for the Iranian people, while we also work to tackle our broader concerns. The Government are encouraging the US Administration and Congress to consider the implications to the security of the US and its allies before taking any further steps that might undermine or weaken the JCPoA.

[HCWS171]

Foreign Affairs Council: 3 April 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 3 April. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, (HRVP), Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

Agenda items included Syria, Yemen and Libya. Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League, debriefed on the Arab summit in Amman over lunch at the invitation of the HRVP.

Syria

The Council discussed the situation in Syria and adopted Council conclusions. The discussion reaffirmed the EU remained committed to a political solution to the crisis. Planning for post-conflict assistance needed to start, but there could be no reconstruction assistance until a credible political transition was firmly underway. The Council agreed to adopt the EU strategy on Syria.

Yemen

The Council discussed the situation in Yemen and adopted Council conclusions. HRVP Mogherini discussed a potential EU role in Yemen to restart political talks.

Foreign Ministers reaffirmed the seriousness of the situation in Yemen and discussed a new framework that had been presented to the warring parties.

Libya

Council members discussed the situation in Libya following the first meeting of the Libya Quartet on 18 March 2017. They discussed common ground between the parties and underlined the EU's commitment to supporting Libyans in finding unity and stability within the framework of the Libyan political agreement.

Ministers agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted conclusions on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

The Council adopted conclusions on Somalia

The Council adopted a decision supporting the UN programme of actions to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) in all its aspects.

The Council extended its decision 2014/129/CFSP until 2 July 2017 in order to ensure the smooth continuation of the work of the EU non-proliferation consortium of think-tanks, based on the funds still available.

The Council amended the restrictive measures in view of the situation in Yemen to transpose an update by the United Nations related to four persons subject to restrictive measures.

The Council adopted a new EU policy on training for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The Council approved the exercise specifications for the EU crisis management military exercise in 2017 (MILEX17).

[HCWS165]

Foreign Affairs Council: 15 May 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 15 May. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

Agenda items included security and defence, Horn of Africa, EU-Africa and the Eastern Partnership.

Security and defence

The security and defence discussion centred on HRVP Mogherini and the European Commission updating Foreign Ministers on a variety of dossiers, including the military planning and conduct capability, permanent structured co-operation, the co-ordinated annual review of defence, the forthcoming ATHENA review, CSDP and the European defence fund.

Horn of Africa

There was widespread agreement among Foreign Ministers that the Horn was of strategic importance for Europe. Mogherini and several others warmly thanked the UK for the London conference which offered an opportunity to stabilise Somalia. Other areas highlighted for increased EU action were the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Nile basin tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia, and using the EU-strategic partnership with Ethiopia to deliver messages on human rights and political reform.

EU-Africa

Mogherini introduced the 4 May EEAS/Commission Joint Communication (JC) on the future direction of the EU-Africa relationship, including deliverables for

the November Africa-EU summit. There were two main themes: creating more resilient states and societies, and generating jobs—especially for young people. Member states welcomed the JC and its proposals to increase investment, jobs, and improve education. Foreign Ministers had lunch with African Union Chair Faki.

Eastern partnership

Foreign Ministers looked forward to the Eastern partnership summit in November and discussed how best to build strong links with partners.

Ministers agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted conclusions on Venezuela.

The Council adopted conclusions on indigenous peoples.

The Council approved a concept of operations on regionalisation of CSDP action in the Sahel.

The Council approved the staff rules of the EU Satellite Centre (SATCEN).

The Council approved the High Representative report on the operation ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Council adopted a decision mobilising €2.64 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) to provide support to 964 dismissed workers made redundant in four Finnish enterprises operating in the manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products sector.

[HCWS167]

Foreign Affairs Council: 17 July 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 17 July. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

The meeting covered discussions on the EU global strategy, democratic people's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Libya and migration.

EU global strategy

The Council had a discussion on the implementation on the EU global strategy; Foreign Ministers provided guidance on the priorities for 2017-2018.

DPRK

The discussion was shaped by the Council conclusions, agreed in the EU Political and Security Committee earlier in the day. Ministers focused on the threat the DPRK posed to global security and condemned its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programme in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

Libya

The Council adopted conclusions on Libya. With the EU warmly welcoming the appointment of Ghassan Salame as the new special representative of the UN Secretary General. The Council also agreed to extend the CSDP mission EUBAM Libya until 31 December 2018. The Council underlined the importance of operation Sophia (the EU's naval operation to disrupt the business model of human smugglers and traffickers in the Southern Central Mediterranean).

Migration

Foreign Ministers discussed migration, focusing on the situation in the Central Mediterranean route, together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Filippo Grandi, and the Director-General of the International Organisation for Migration William Lacy Swing.

Ministers agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted a crisis management concept for a new civilian CSDP mission in Iraq.

On 17 July 2017, the Council added 16 persons to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime.

The Council adopted conclusions on Pakistan, stating that the EU has a clear interest in a stable, secure, and democratic Pakistan.

The Council adopted conclusions on addressing the risks of famine.

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU priorities at the UN and at the 72nd UN General Assembly.

The Council endorsed the EU-ASEAN plan of action 2018-2022.

[HCWS168]

Foreign Affairs Council (16 October)

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 October. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting will be held in Luxembourg.

Foreign Affairs Council

The agenda for the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is expected to include Iran, Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), Turkey and human rights. Hungary has indicated that it will raise under Any Other Business its concerns over recent amendments to Ukraine's education law.

Iran

Ministers will discuss the latest developments regarding the joint comprehensive plan of action. The UK fully supports full implementation of the deal by all parties. Preventing a nuclear armed Iran is a UK priority for both our security and that of the region.

DPRK

Ministers will focus on the threat the DPRK poses to global security and condemn its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions. We want the discussion to reinforce the importance of a strong and united EU response. The UK has led efforts to agree a new set of EU autonomous measures against the DPRK set to be adopted at the Foreign Affairs Council. We will make clear the importance of the EU and all its members states supporting the full enforcement in third countries of the measures adopted under United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Turkey

Ministers will informally discuss development over lunch with a focus on the regional situation.

Human rights

Ministers will discuss the EU's approach to human rights challenges in bilateral and multilateral fora. We will stress that wider equities in EU and member state relationships with third countries should not preclude

holding those countries to account for failure to observe their human rights obligations and make clear that the UK will continue to work closely with the EU on human rights even after we leave. Council conclusions will be adopted.

[HCWS170]

**Informal Meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (Gymnich):
28 April 2017**

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I attended the bi-annual informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (known as the Gymnich) on 28 April in Valletta, Malta. The Gymnich was hosted by Dr George Veila, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta and was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. Discussion centred on Turkey, globalisation, the EU global strategy and the previous day's violence in the Macedonia Parliament.

Johannes Hahn (EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations) also attended. David McAllister (Chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee) was present for the opening session on Turkey. EU Foreign Ministers met with the Foreign Ministers of the candidate countries in the afternoon.

The format of the Gymnich is designed to allow EU Foreign Ministers to engage in informal discussion on a number of issues. In contrast to the Foreign Affairs Council (the next of which will be held on 19 June), Ministers do not take formal decisions or agree conclusions at the Gymnich.

Gymnich discussion

Turkey

EU Foreign Ministers discussed Turkey in the opening session, agreeing on the need to maintain a dialogue with this strategic partner. I welcomed this consensus and stressed the importance of the tone of our engagement. In the afternoon, EU Foreign Ministers were joined by their Turkish counterpart (Cavusoglu) who touched on a number of matters of shared interest, including the result of the recent constitutional referendum.

Globalisation

Ms. Mogherini introduced a discussion on how to ensure the global trade agenda delivers demonstrable benefits for all EU citizens.

EU global strategy (EUGS)

Ms. Mogherini gave the assembled EU Foreign Ministers an account of the EU's activity in the foreign and security policy sphere since the publication of the global strategy (EUGS) last June.

Violence in the FYROM Parliament

Several member states condemned the violence in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Parliament on 27 April. The FYROM Foreign Minister (Poposki) said there could be no justification for the violence and that those responsible would be brought to justice.

[HCWS166]

**Informal Meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (Gymnich):
7-8 September 2017**

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the bi-annual informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (known as the Gymnich) on 7-8 September in Tallinn, Estonia. The Gymnich was hosted by Sven Mikser, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, and was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. Discussion centred on Democratic People Republic of Korea (DPRK), Middle East Peace Policy (MEPP) and working methods.

Johannes Hahn (EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations) also attended. David McAllister (Chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee) was present for the working dinner and session on the second day. EU Foreign Ministers met Foreign Ministers of the candidate countries on the morning of 8 September.

The format of the Gymnich is designed to allow EU Foreign Ministers to engage in informal discussion on a number of issues. In contrast to the Foreign Affairs Council (the next of which will be held on 16 October), Ministers do not take formal decisions or agree conclusions at the Gymnich.

Gymnich discussion

MEPP

Ministers agreed that a two-state solution was the only way forward but the humanitarian situation was severe. Ms. Mogherini explained that the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Commission were reviewing EU financial assistance to look at what would be most effective in advancing the two state solution.

DPRK

Ms. Mogherini proposed three strands of EU action. First, economic pressure. The EU should support a new UNSCR and adopt new EU sanctions, including looking at EU investment and targeted measures. Second, diplomatic action and insistence on peaceful denuclearisation. Third, protecting the global non-proliferation regime. The EU should lobby countries that weren't fully implementing existing UN sanctions on DPRK and protect the JCPOA.

Countering violent extremism

Ministers welcomed the existing security and counter-terrorism co-operation between the European Union and the EU candidate countries and agreed that it should be further developed and intensified.

[HCWS169]

HOME DEPARTMENT

**Annual Report of the Independent Anti-Slavery
Commissioner**

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): I am pleased to announce that I am today laying before the House the 2017 annual report of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Copies of the report are available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS174]

UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery 2017

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Today, I am publishing the 2017 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery. The report covers the whole of the UK and has been drafted in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government. This report sets out an assessment of the scale of modern slavery in the UK, and outlines the actions that have taken to combat it over the last year.

A copy of the report will be placed in the House Library.

[HCWS175]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of her TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 31 August 2017)	6
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 31 August 2017)	5
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	4
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	1
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	26
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	1
The number of current subjects relocated under TPIM legislation (as of 31 August 2017)	6

The TPIM review group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. The most recent TRG meetings took place on 26 and 30 June, and 3, 4 and 5 July. The next round of TRGs will take place during September 2017.

One TPIM subject has been charged with breach of his TPIM measures the trial is pending.

The case of *Secretary of State for the Home Department v IM, JM and LG* [2017] EWHC 1529 (Admin) was heard at the High Court between 20 March and 7 April 2017. In a judgment handed down on 30 June 2017 Mr Justice Nicol upheld the Secretary of State's decision to impose a TPIM notice on IM, JM and LG. In the same judgment Mr Justice Nicol ordered minor variations to IM, JM and LG's police reporting requirements and a variation to the wording of the association measure.

This judgment can be found at: www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/1529.html

[HCWS173]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development in Africa and South Asia

The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel): Over the next decade, a billion more young people will enter the job market, mainly in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. There is a chronic need for jobs and better opportunities in these countries to prevent the next generation falling further into poverty, potentially fuelling global instability and insecurity.

As set out in DFID's Economic Development Strategy, the UK Government want to support developing countries to transition into vibrant economies and become stronger trading partners. No country can defeat poverty and leave aid dependency behind without sustainable economic growth, jobs, trade and investment.

CDC is central to the UK's approach to promoting inclusive growth and economic development in Africa and south Asia. As the UK's development finance institution, wholly owned by the UK Government, it is a world leader in its field. It provides much-needed capital, expertise and support to businesses in the poorest and most fragile countries, helping them to grow markets and create jobs which change the lives of individuals, families and whole communities.

CDC invests for development impact, introducing much-needed capital, expertise and support to thousands of businesses, creating millions of jobs, generating essential taxes, and strengthening transformational sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing and agriculture. Over the last 3 years—from 2014 through to 2016—companies backed by CDC in Africa and south Asia have created over 3 million new direct and indirect jobs, and paid taxes to national governments worth over \$9 billion.

In agreement with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Elizabeth Truss MP, I am pleased to set out the next step in the UK's commitment to the growth of CDC, through a gradual capital increase over the next five years. This follows the passing of the CDC Act earlier this year which increased the limit of capital which the UK could invest in CDC.

New capital will enable CDC to build on these excellent development results to make hundreds more investments, create millions of new jobs, and make a lasting difference to the lives of people in the world's poorest and most fragile countries, by helping individuals to find work, earn money, feed their families and send their children to school.

The decision to invest new capital in CDC comes at a critical time. There is a huge shortfall in the investment needed to meet the ambitions of the global goals agreed by the UN in 2015. The UK is rising to this challenge by using Government-funded capital in innovative ways. By investing patiently, CDC demonstrates to private investors the opportunities that exist, even in the most difficult places. This leads the way for other investors to follow, mobilising capital from a much larger pool of private investors.

Over the last 5 years, since 2012, DFID have been working together with CDC in a thoughtful and phased way to grow CDC's capabilities, better measure its impact and identify the need for the long-term, patient capital that CDC can invest to transform the economies of developing countries.

In February Parliament passed the CDC Act, which benefitted from constructive inputs and debate from MPs and Peers from across both Houses.

In July, CDC published its new five year strategy. This strategy maintains CDC's focus on investing in the poorest and most fragile countries in Africa and south Asia and sets out innovative approaches to maximise the transformational impact of CDC's investments, while committing CDC to increased levels of transparency and reporting.

DFID will invest an average of up to £703 million per year over the next five years, to support CDC's new strategy and scale up its job-creating investment activities. These funds will be drawn down as needed by CDC in response to market demand. The new capital will support investments in Africa and south Asia in priority sectors—those creating the most jobs in the hardest to reach. Capital invested in CDC is invested and reinvested time and again, to ensure that every penny of taxpayers' money is having maximum development impact. At the same time, CDC is leading the way globally with its code of responsible investing, raising the social, environmental and governance standards of investment in the world's poorest countries.

This investment is the outcome of extensive analysis and a detailed business case—a copy of which is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capital-increase-to-cdc-the-uks-development-finance-institution-to-deliver-increased-development-impact-in-africa-and-south-asia-2017-2022>.

I am proud to set out this support today, which will have huge development impact for decades to come. CDC's investments lay the foundations for sustainable and responsible businesses which create jobs, provide vital services, strengthen economies and ultimately transform the world's poorest nations, and in doing so, build global security and prosperity that benefits us all.

[HCWS163]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disabled People's Employment Corporation (GB) Ltd

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt): The Disabled People's Employment Corporation (GB) Ltd, one of DWP's arm's-length bodies, has entered solvent members' voluntary liquidation. Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP are the liquidators and any residual asset value will be returned to the Department. The company was previously Remploy Ltd and has been managing legacy issues following the exit of remploy employment services from Government control in April 2015 as a partly employee-owned company.

Since 2015, the board has been working towards a well-ordered closure, dealing with legacy assets and liabilities. The last premises were sold in September 2017, and the company's members agreed to put the company into liquidation on 7 October 2017.

I plan to deposit the company's accounts for the period up to liquidation in the Library of the House in due course. But I can reassure the House that the directors believe the company has sufficient assets to settle its creditors in full, and there will be no redundancies as the company has had no employees since 2015. The pensions of those who worked for the company are secure: the Remploy Ltd Pension and Assurance Scheme has been sponsored directly by my Department since 1 April 2016.

The liquidators are now responsible for the company, and the Department will manage the contract with the liquidator, who will refer any significant decisions regarding the on-going management of the Department's investment in the company to the principal accounting officer if necessary. Responsibilities during this liquidation period are explained in the framework document which will be deposited in the Library of the House today.

[HCWS164]

Petitions

Monday 16 October 2017

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Bangor-on-Dee Post Office

The petition of residents of Clwyd South,

Declares that Bangor-on-Dee Post Office is a central part of the community and that the services it offers are invaluable; and further that its closure will mean the loss of vital Post Office and banking services which will have a catastrophic effect on the rural community currently served by Bangor-on-Dee Post Office.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make provisions to ensure that Bangor-On-Dee Post Office remains open and available for use by the community.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Susan Elan Jones, Official Report, 13 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 947.]

[P002056]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):

The Government recognise the value of Post Office services to local communities across the country and appreciate the difficulty and frustration that any temporary loss in Post Office services can cause to the local community. The network is at its most stable in decades due to the significant investment that has been made to maintain and protect it. This investment has delivered the refreshed customer environments, increased opening hours and efficiency of operation which is needed to succeed in the competitive and changing markets in which the Post Office operates.

The Post Office is a commercial business operating in competitive markets, and we allow it the freedom to operate commercially on a day-to-day basis. This includes the provision and location of individual post office branches, which is the operational responsibility of the business.

Unplanned closures can occur because of a situation beyond the control of the Post Office and Government understand that following the resignation of the postmaster and the withdrawal of the premises for Post Office use, Bangor Isycoed Post Office temporarily closed on Wednesday 27 September 2017.

The Post Office knows how important Post Office services are to the community and apologises to customers for any inconvenience caused. The company is currently investigating options available which will enable it to restore services to the local community, and in situations where there has been a temporary closure, it works hard to restore services as soon as possible. This can take some time depending on the individual circumstances and any future service will need to be sustainable for the

person operating the service and for Post Office. Any customers wishing to access Post Office services in the interim may do so from a convenient Post Office branch, including Pentre Maelor Post Office.

Drumchapel Post Office

The petition of residents of Glasgow North West,

Declares that Post Office Limited has announced that the Post Office on Hecla Avenue in Drumchapel is under threat of closure; further that this provides a vital service for many local residents, the loss of which would have a detrimental impact on the wider community in Drumchapel as well as causing concern for staff; further that whilst there is the opportunity to franchise the current office, this could endanger the ongoing provisions of services and jobs in the local area, as well as this branch's current convenient location in the heart of the community; and further that visiting the Post Office, it is noticeable just how busy the counters are and how strongly the community feels about this proposal.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call upon the Post Office to halt any plans to close the Drumchapel Post Office and ensure that these services and jobs can be maintained and protected in the local area.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Carol Monaghan, Official Report, 25 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1067.]

[P002033]

Observation from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):

The Government recognise the value of Post Office services to local communities across the country and understand that any potential change to service provision can cause uncertainty for the community and that some residents may hold strong views regarding this. The network is at its most stable in decades due to the significant investment that has been made to maintain and protect it. This investment has delivered the refreshed customer environments, increased opening hours and efficiency of operation which is needed to succeed in the competitive and changing markets in which the Post Office operates.

The Post Office operates as an independent business and the Government do not play a role in the day-to-day operational responsibilities of the company, which include decisions on the provision and location of individual Post Office services.

The Post Office's rationale in looking for a franchise partner for some of its Crown branches is to ensure continued access to Post Office services for customers in the area in a way that is sustainable for the long-term. It is important that the business can ensure it has the right branches in the right locations to respond to changing consumer and market demands. Communities do not lose their post office. It is either franchised on-site or relocated to a nearby location, often on the high street, typically offering the same wide range of Post Office services.

Franchising Crown offices has proven a successful approach in the past and working with a retail partner is a sensible response to the challenges facing high street

retailers, with the benefit of shared overheads across the combined Post Office and retail businesses, including property and staff costs, with the host also benefiting from increased footfall and income from Post Office products. Before the Post Office considers franchising a branch it undertakes detailed work to assess its long-term viability. The vast majority of the network (over 97%) already operates on a franchise basis.

Both the Post Office and its franchise partners are committed to providing a quality service to their customers. Overall customer satisfaction levels with the Post Office across its network are good, with levels of satisfaction over service and wait time acceptability both consistently very high. A recent report on the network published by Citizen's Advice found that former Crown branches are performing in line with or better than traditional Crowns, in terms of access into and inside the branch as well as the quality of service.

In line with its Code of Practice, when the Post Office has a viable proposal for the franchise it will conduct a six-week local consultation, which will give customers and interested stakeholders an opportunity to find out the detail of the proposals and to provide feedback, which can help the Post Office shape its plans. The Post Office considers all feedback received during its consultation process carefully.

Morningside Post Office Franchising

The petition of Edinburgh South,

Declares that the government has forced a transformation programme on the Post Office that has placed Crown Post Offices and local branches in jeopardy; further that the only independent report carried out on franchising found that the Crown Office closure and franchising programme had been bad for customers, ranking franchises worse than Crown Offices across a range of indicators including queue times, service times, customer service and advice on products, disabled access and staffed counter positions; and further that the Post Office has already spent money refurbishing the Crown Offices it is now closing and franchising, with £5.9 million spent since 2010 on refurbishing the 59 Crown Offices that the Post Office announced it would close and franchise in 2016, an average of £100,000 per branch.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to suspend the Crown Office closure and franchising programme and instead ensure the Post Office works with Crown branches, including Morningside Post Office, to make them more efficient and profitable.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Murray, Official Report, 25 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1069.]

[P002039]

Observation from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):

The Government recognise the value of Post Office services to local communities across the country and understand that any potential change to service provision can cause uncertainty for the community and that some residents may hold strong views regarding this. The network is at its most stable in decades due to the significant investment that has been made to maintain

and protect it. This investment has delivered the refreshed customer environments, increased opening hours and efficiency of operation which is needed to succeed in the competitive and changing markets in which the Post Office operates.

The Post Office operates as an independent business and the Government do not play a role in the day-to-day operational responsibilities of the company, which include decisions on the provision and location of individual Post Office services.

The Post Office's rationale in looking for a franchise partner for some of its Crown branches is to ensure continued access to Post Office services for customers in the area in a way that is sustainable for the long-term. It is important that the business can ensure it has the right branches in the right locations to respond to changing consumer and market demands. Communities do not lose their post office. It is either franchised on-site or relocated to a nearby location, often on the high street, typically offering the same wide range of Post Office services.

Franchising of its Crown offices has proven a successful approach in the past and working with a retail partner is a sensible response to the challenges facing high street retailers, with the benefit of shared overheads across the combined Post Office and retail business, including property and staff costs, with the host retailer also benefiting from increased footfall and income from Post Office products. Before the Post Office considers franchising a branch it undertakes detailed work to assess its long-term viability. The vast majority of the network (over 97%) already operates on a franchise basis.

When making changes to a branch, the Post Office is aware of the needs of its customers, including its elderly and disabled customers, and works with the new partner to ensure that customer access both into and within the store meets Post Office's accessibility standards and all applicable statutory requirements. Both the Post Office and its franchise partners are also committed to providing a quality service to their customers. Overall customer satisfaction levels with the Post Office across its network are good, with levels of satisfaction over service and wait time acceptability both consistently very high. A recent report on the network published by Citizen's Advice found that former Crown branches are performing in line with or better than traditional Crowns, in terms of access into and inside the branch as well as the quality of service.

The Post Office regularly invests in all its branches to ensure they are in modern and secure retail environments. Investment made will have benefited customers and staff during that time and some of that investment will be transferable, for example such as with re-use of equipment and IT.

DEFENCE

Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and High Town Barracks, Wrexham

The petition of residents of Wrexham in the constituency of Wrexham,

Declares that the petitioners recognise the long military tradition of Wrexham and North Wales and its relationship with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and Royal Electrical and

Mechanical Engineers; further declares that they are deeply concerned over the proposal to move the battalion headquarters from Wrexham to Bristol, and away from the area which has served the British Army and Wales for so many years.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to retain the current 101 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Wrexham.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian C. Lucas, *Official Report*, 25 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1068.]

[P002035]

The petition of residents in the constituency of Clwyd South,

Declares that the petitioners recognise the long military tradition of Wrexham and North Wales and its relationship with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; further declares that they are deeply concerned over the proposal to move the battalion headquarters from Wrexham to Bristol, and away from the area which has served the British Army and Wales for so many years.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to retain the current 101 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Wrexham.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Susan Elan Jones, *Official Report*, 25 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1068.]

[P002036]

Observations from the Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):

This decision to transfer the headquarters of 101 Battalion from Wrexham to Bristol has been made as a part of Army 2020 Refine, which is refining the

Army's force structures to deliver the commitments made by the Government in the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015.

Army 2020 Refine continues our investment in the Army Reserve and sustains the successful pairing strategy between regular and reserve units envisioned by Army 2020. It also maximises the reserve presence in geographical areas that recruit well and has created two new reserve infantry battalions, and a new reserve engineer regiment will be established next year.

As a part of this approach, the Reserve Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) are being reorganised nationally to provide a smaller number of more technical specialists to support the warfighting division. The changes will result in the removal of three Reserve REME Battalions (104, 105 and 106 REME) and the transfer of the functions provided by the headquarters of 101 Battalion from Wrexham to Bristol. All personnel affected will be assisted to transfer to the co-located Royal Welsh Regiment or other units locally.

The Army remains committed to North Wales and the important and valued relationship with the region. Hightown Barracks Army Reserve Centre in Wrexham will continue to home a platoon from 3rd Battalion The Royal Welsh, a detachment from Wales University Officer Training Corps and a detachment of Clwyd & Gwynedd Army Cadet Force. There are also Army Reserve units in Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Caernarfon, and Queensferry.

North Wales also continues to be home to the RAF's advanced fast jet training school at RAF Valley, where the runway was recently refurbished to extend its life by a further 25 years. Meanwhile, the Defence Electronics & Components Agency (DECA), based at MOD Sealand in North East Wales, was chosen as the global repair hub providing maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade services for F-35 avionics and aircraft components. Both emphasise the continued importance of North Wales to Defence.

Ministerial Correction

Monday 16 October 2017

HEALTH

Mental Health Workforce

The following are extracts from questions to the Secretary of State for Health on 10 October 2017.

1. **Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to increase the size of the mental health workforce. [901005]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today is World Mental Health Day and the whole House will want to congratulate Time2Change on its 10th anniversary and the remarkable change in attitudes towards mental illness that it has helped to bring about. Our mental health workforce has increased by 30,000 since 2010 and another 21,000 posts are planned.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Secretary of State's claim that thousands of extra mental health staff will be appointed by 2021 is fanciful unless he tells us how they will be funded. Today, the Care Quality Commission reports that mental health services are struggling to staff wards safely. We have

also learned recently that two out of five mental health staff have been abused or attacked by patients in the past year. Most blame staff shortages for that violence. Rather than telling us about recruiting for 2021, what is the Secretary of State going to do today to protect staff from violence?

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the hon. Lady what has happened in mental health. Some 30,000 more people are working in mental health today than when her Government left office—a 5.8% increase in clinical staff.

[Official Report, 10 October 2017, Vol. 629, c. 143-45.]

Letter of correction from Mr Hunt:

Errors have been identified in the responses I gave to Questions to the Secretary of State for Health.

The correct responses should have been:

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today is World Mental Health Day and the whole House will want to congratulate Time2Change on its 10th anniversary and the remarkable change in attitudes towards mental illness that it has helped to bring about. Our workforce has increased by 30,000 since 2010 and another 21,000 **mental health** posts are planned.

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the hon. Lady what has happened in mental health. Some 30,000 more people are working **in the NHS** today than when her Government left office—a 5.8% increase in clinical staff.

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 16 October 2017

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Monday 23 October 2017**

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Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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