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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 29 November 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 29 November 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Yemen

1. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What humanitarian support her Department is providing to Yemen. [902617]

3. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What humanitarian support her Department is providing to Yemen. [902619]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 21 million people in need of aid. The crisis will lead to famine unless all sides allow immediate commercial and humanitarian access throughout the country. The UK is playing a leading role in the current humanitarian and diplomatic response.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I also welcome them to their position and wish them all the very best.

At the Select Committee on Defence two weeks ago, General Sir Richard Barrons stated that

“intelligent, thoughtful officials like the National Security Adviser are looking at the £62 billion we spend on aid, diplomacy and defence and wondering if they can get a mix out of that.”

Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the balance is being struck between the United Kingdom's tax receipts for sales to Saudi Arabia for it to flatten Yemen and the money that we are spending on development aid to rebuild Yemen?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We have been very clear that although we understand the coalition's security concerns, they are not incompatible with allowing food and other supplies into the country. A huge diplomatic effort is being made, led by the Prime Minister, and she is using her visit this week to press further still. There has been movement in getting some aid and commercial supplies through, but that will not be enough. We need to keep pressing, and that is what this Government will do.

**Alison Thewliss:** The Foreign Secretary met a range of international partners yesterday. Unfortunately, the communiqué from that meeting seemed to talk a lot more about weapons than about getting aid and commercial goods into Yemen. Will the Secretary of State tell me a bit more about what the UK Government are doing to get aid and commercial goods into the country? Aid

agencies know that the country needs not just aid but commercial goods. Each day, 130 children are dying in Yemen. We cannot wait any longer.

**Penny Mordaunt:** The communiqué did speak about what we are doing. In addition to the diplomatic efforts, a large part of my time since I have been in post has been spent looking at the other possible options in order logistically to get what is needed to the people who need it. There are immense problems, but we are looking at plan B—what else we can do. The key thing, and the only way to get the full supplies in, is to open up those two ports, and that is what we are pressing for.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her place and am delighted to see her there. Given the vital need to get humanitarian aid into Yemen, will she confirm what work the UK Government are doing via the United Nations to secure this access, particularly given our role in the Security Council?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I have been in close contact with both the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and the Secretary-General himself. We are all working together to impress upon the coalition the importance of getting in not just aid but, critically, commercial supplies. That has been the main thrust of our argument. Clearly, a political settlement is needed in the long term, and we are pushing for all partners to engage.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The situation for Yemen's remaining Jews is harrowing, particularly for those outside the capital. What work is her Department doing to support the work of other Government Departments in helping to provide safe passage to other countries for these individuals?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We are extremely conscious of this matter. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East has been doing an enormous amount of work, looking at particular communities. There are enormous numbers of people—21 million—who are in an absolutely dire situation. As well as trying to get the immediate issues resolved, we must keep pressing for a political process and for all parties to engage with efforts of the UN's Special Envoy.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): It does not look as though the Prime Minister is being any more successful on this issue than she is on so many others. It really is a disgrace that although the Secretary of State's Department is working on the humanitarian aspects by providing food and other aid to Yemen, we continue to sell arms to Saudi Arabia, which fuels the conflict. Where is the sense in that?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I understand the right hon. Lady's concerns, but as I have said, while we do accept there are legitimate security concerns, that is entirely separate from, and should not be conflated with, preventing aid and commercial supplies from getting to a population. We are extremely concerned about the situation; we are extremely concerned that the coalition may be in breach of international humanitarian law, and I would refer her to the statement my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East gave on 7 November.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. I heard what she just said, but on Sunday it emerged that the UK had been providing military assistance to Saudi Arabia to carry out military training as part of Operation Crossways. With the Foreign Secretary hosting Foreign Ministers from the region yesterday for talks, does the Secretary of State think that the UK's military support and arms sales to Saudi Arabia are helping or hindering a political solution to the simply appalling and worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I thank the hon. Lady and other Members who have welcomed me to my post.

Although the UK military has provided training on targeting, to try to reduce civilian casualties, that has been entirely separate from the Saudi coalition's actual campaign. We are trying to utilise the military-to-military contacts that we do have, which are deep, as part of our diplomatic process to try and get the coalition to realise that it must let aid into the two ports. We are also providing £1.3 million to help the UN's verification and inspection mechanisms. If we can supply any practical support to give the coalition confidence that weapons are not coming in with aid, we will do that.

### Polio

2. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of international efforts to eradicate polio. [902618]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** Since 1988, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has been highly effective in leading international efforts that have reduced polio cases by more than 99%. Only 15 cases have been reported in 2017—in two countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan—and we hope the last case will come through at the end of this year or early next year.

**Luke Hall:** I thank the Minister for that answer. May I also take the opportunity to welcome the leadership the Government have shown in the battle to eradicate polio from the face of this earth? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is exactly the sort of thing the great British public can get behind, support and welcome our aid being used for?

**Alistair Burt:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and he is absolutely right. Eradicating polio will be one of the great global public health success stories. United Kingdom taxpayer support since 1988 has helped prevent 1.5 million childhood deaths, and 16 million people are walking today who would otherwise be paralysed. People across the UK can be proud—not least those who support the Rotary movement, because the Rotary movement worldwide has played an important part, and I thank my colleagues in the Sandy Rotary club for their efforts in this regard.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that what has marked out the fight against polio is its international nature, and that we should be pressing this same approach to tackling other diseases at the Commonwealth summit next year?

**Alistair Burt:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The use of United Kingdom funds to support things such as the Global Fund, which take part in international activity, and to strengthen global health systems is important. We have to work in partnership with others. The Commonwealth summit will provide a good opportunity to emphasise more of what we can do together.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Department on the work that is being done to help eradicate polio. However, there is a risk that it can return if inoculations do not take place. Will he use the opportunity of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next year to press the case for further inoculations across the Commonwealth?

**Alistair Burt:** We are working with those who are putting together the Commonwealth summit to make sure there is an ambitious agenda devoted to all aspects of life in the Commonwealth, including global health. My hon. Friend is right on immunisation: through the GPEI, the UK will immunise 45 million children against polio and save more than 65,000 children from paralysis each year, so there will be no let-up in immunisation and the fight to make sure polio is eradicated.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the Minister show the same level of commitment he has shown on the international level to the prevention and eradication of animal and livestock diseases—something that poses a grave threat to very rural constituencies such as mine?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. That is scarcely even tangentially related to the matter on the paper. What the hon. Gentleman is implicitly saying is, "I don't really like this question, and therefore I'd like to propose the insertion of another in its stead." It is ingenious to the point of being cheeky. A one-sentence reply of no more than 20 words from the Minister.

**Alistair Burt:** I will draw the attention of one of my hon. Friends in the Government to the hon. Gentleman's question.

**Mr Speaker:** Splendid.

### Value for Money

4. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote value for money in aid spending. [902620]

5. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote value for money in aid spending. [902621]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Rory Stewart):** We work continuously to improve the way we design, implement and monitor programmes. Spending money well, wisely and efficiently makes sense both because it is British taxpayers' money and because it allows us to deliver better education, better healthcare and better nutrition for some of the world's poorest people.

**Lucy Allan:** Greater transparency in how and where aid money is spent is vital to ensure public confidence. Will my hon. Friend champion the transparency agenda and ensure that aid to the Palestinian Authority does not fund radicalisation?

**Rory Stewart:** My hon. Friend's question on the Palestinian Authority is for my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East, but the basic principle is clear. This is not just about transparency. Transparency is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving accountability. It is not just about getting the data out there; it is about making sure that people in the developing world can access the data, understand the data and use the data. We can improve only if we are challenged.

**Alex Burghart:** I welcome the Minister's comments on accountability. My constituents raise value for money in aid spending with me on a regular basis. Does he agree that accountability to people in poor countries is essential in getting value for money?

**Rory Stewart:** Absolutely, and the challenge of accountability in the developing world is great. Here in Britain, where there is a free media and a lot of civil society, it is very easy, as we all know, for people to challenge a rail project or what is happening in a hospital. In the developing world, we need to invest in ensuring that we have the right kind of beneficiary feedback, because it is the people on the ground who know more, and we will improve only if we listen.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, the Select Committee on International Development published our first report of the Parliament on global education. I urge the Government to respond soon to our recommendation that we should fully fund replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education and to make that announcement as early as possible.

**Rory Stewart:** We will be announcing the refresh of our education policy early next year. The key thing, on which we agree absolutely with the Select Committee, is to drive up the quality of education. Attendance is right up, but far too many children are coming out entirely illiterate.

11. [902628] **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Is the Minister convinced that expenditure on private schools in Africa is the best use of public money and provides the best outcomes, given the report published recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg)?

**Rory Stewart:** Ninety five per cent. of all our education spending goes to public education. However, there is a place, particularly in some of the poorest and most remote parts of the world, for recognising that the private sector is filling with low-cost education a hole that the public sector sometimes cannot fill.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What assessment has the Department made of the value for money of its spending in Bangladesh to help the Rohingya people, particularly given the Secretary of State's recent visit to the area?

**Rory Stewart:** Our assessment is that our humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh, which at the moment amounts to more than £40 million, is carefully monitored and well spent. It is focused, above all, on providing shelter and protection, particularly protection against sexual violence in conflict.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): May I first welcome the Secretary of State to her new post? May I also welcome the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to the Gallery?

There is no greater value for money in aid spending than protecting the future of our natural world for generations to come. Following the UN COP23 talks earlier this month, which I attended, it is undeniable that we are reaching the tipping point of no return on climate change, and all nations agreed that we must go "further, faster, together". Given that the Department for International Development is a major shareholder in the World Bank, which still spends much more on oil, gas and coal than on clean energy, will the Secretary of State give me her personal commitment that she will use all her powers of persuasion with the World Bank to ensure that it invests more in clean, safe renewables than in fossil fuels?

**Rory Stewart:** The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed this in the past, and I pay tribute to the work that he does on the environment. We are pressing the World Bank to do that, and that is one of the functions of the new financing facilities that we have established, but there is still a place for non-renewable energy generation, particularly to meet the desperate needs in Africa.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): One of the best ways to spend money is on malaria, as I have seen as chair of the all-party group on malaria. The "World Malaria Report" is released today, and it shows a worrying stalling in progress on malaria. Could my hon. Friend commit the UK Government to ensuring that as much as possible is done to make further progress?

**Rory Stewart:** That is a very important issue, in which the UK Government are proud to have invested heavily, along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the US Government, who have done a lot on this. There is, I believe, an event in Speaker's House immediately after this to commemorate some of the progress that is being made on malaria, but my hon. Friend is absolutely correct that this is an issue on which we need to do much more, and the fact is that progress is stalling.

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role, and I look forward to our exchanges across the Dispatch Box. The Secretary of State's predecessor resigned because she was caught trying to give aid money to the Israeli defence forces. Securitisation and militarisation of the aid budget, which is supposed to go to the world's poorest, seem to be the new normal under this Government. What are the Secretary of State's plans on spending aid money on military and the police, and will the spending go up or down?

**Rory Stewart:** It is absolutely central to remember that we must address the root causes of poverty, and a lot of those lie in fragile and conflict-affected states. If we try to separate off the work we do on education,

health and humanitarian assistance from the political and military drivers of conflict, we will never resolve these problems. But we absolutely take on board the fact that our prime responsibility is towards the poorest in the world. Our programmes on conflict are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. I would like to ask the hon. Lady: who made the 0.7% target? It is absolutely central that we do these things together.

**Kate Osamor:** I thank the Minister for his response, but new figures show that in 2016 aid spending on the £1 billion conflict stability and security fund increased by £27 million. That was spent mainly through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on propping up the military and police in places such as Bahrain, Ethiopia and Syria. With no scrutiny from DFID or Parliament's Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, how can we measure the impact? Does the Minister believe that this is value for money?

**Rory Stewart:** I absolutely believe it is value for money. There are currently 23 million people at risk of starvation in north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. The reason why they are at risk of starvation is conflict. These are not natural disasters; they are driven by conflict. Unless we find political solutions to these conflicts, we will have 23 million people continuing to die throughout the world. We will not apologise for our approach, because it is a central part of our development policy.

### Modern Slavery

6. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle modern slavery in developing countries. [902622]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** The Department is playing a leading role in the cross-government effort to tackle the scourge of modern slavery, and expanding our work in developing countries to tackle this barbaric crime. Our "work in freedom" programme has already reached over 380,000 women and girls in south Asia and the middle east.

**Paul Masterton:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer and I welcome her to her position. Saturday was International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Given that around 75% of victims of modern slavery are women, will she join me in paying tribute to campaigners and organisations across the country, including the Women's Aid refuge in Barrhead in my constituency, for what they do to tackle this crime?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I would be very happy to congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents for the work that they are doing. Modern slavery is something that many people across the country are concerned about. We should be proud that our country and our Prime Minister are leading the way, most recently in convening leaders at the UN to launch the call for action to end modern slavery, which now has 40 signatories.

### Topical Questions

T1. [902647] **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** I have just returned from Bangladesh, where I saw for myself the Rohingya camp and heard from refugees of the horrific atrocities that they have endured. I applaud the generosity of the Bangladeshi Government and the people of Bangladesh, as well as British taxpayers and all who have donated to the Disasters Emergency Committee's appeal. Although every refugee has expressed the desire to return home, I have made it clear to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that any returns must be voluntary, safe and sustainable. Those conditions are far from being met.

**Stephen Gethins:** As in Bangladesh and Burma, the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Yemen is a man-made one. The Secretary of State talked about having influence on the perpetrators of that conflict. With the tax take from arms sales now outstripping the level of aid, does she not think the time has come to stop arms sales to the combatants in that conflict?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I will say it for the third time: there are genuine security concerns on the part of the Saudi-led coalition, but that is entirely separate from the issue of allowing aid and commercial supplies into ports. We think that they can address their security concerns, and we are prepared to assist them in some measure to do that, but there is no excuse, legitimate though their concerns are, for stopping food and supplies getting to the individuals who need them.

T2. [902648] **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): British non-governmental organisations are now the largest recipients of grant funding through the EU's ECHO humanitarian programme, precisely because they are very good at what they do. Will the Secretary of State look at ways of continuing a relationship with ECHO once we leave the EU, so that our NGOs can have stable funding to continue to do their important work in fragile states?

**Penny Mordaunt:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: our NGOs are second to none. If we are going to continue to make our funds deliver, provide value for money and have the impact required, British NGOs still need to be delivering that aid. All this will be part of the negotiations, but I concur exactly with my right hon. Friend's sentiments.

T4. [902650] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions has the Department had with United Nations Women on the UK Government's contribution to its core funding?

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt):** Support to protect women and girls, whether in relation to education, sanitation or refugees, has been a significant part of the work DFID is doing. We are constantly in contact with UN agencies about what more can be done both for women in conflict and for women in developing countries, and that is a major part of DFID's programme.

T3. [902649] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Government ensure that their aid focuses on projects to improve sanitation and infection control to reduce the need to use antibiotics, as part of our global commitment to tackle antimicrobial resistance?

**Alistair Burt:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Reducing the transmission of infection is an effective way of decreasing the need for antibiotics. Our approach is to strengthen national health systems to address infection prevention and control, and this includes hygiene and sanitation in health facilities.

T5. [902651] **Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): The House will be aware that this Friday marks World AIDS Day. Will the Minister tell us what the Department is going to do to build on this country's expertise and investment to date to ensure that critical AIDS vaccines are delivered to Africa?

**Alistair Burt:** I am pleased to join the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure the whole House, in commemorating World AIDS Day. We have been a long-term supporter of the international AIDS vaccine initiative, and we are the largest international funder of HIV prevention, care and treatment. From the £1.1 billion going into the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, 1.3 million retroviral drugs will be provided through the UK this year. There will be no let-up in the fight, and we are united on that.<sup>1</sup>

T7. [902653] **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Following the recent resignation of Robert Mugabe, will my hon. Friend outline what reviews the Department will be taking of the provision of UK aid to help Zimbabwe to secure a positive and prosperous future?

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Rory Stewart):** I have recently returned from a visit to Zimbabwe. These are early days, and we need to watch very carefully what kinds of economic and political reforms are introduced by Mr Mnangagwa's Government. However, if such reforms are forthcoming, there is a great deal that the British Government can do: first, in supporting governance reform; secondly, in supporting the business climate; and thirdly, in getting International Monetary Fund support for the Government of Zimbabwe.

T6. [902652] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On Monday evening, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow presented its excellent report on "Global Citizenship in the Scottish Health Service". [Interruption.] What discussions have taken place between DFID and health service officials across the UK about harnessing the huge mutual benefits of supporting health staff to volunteer overseas? [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I hope the Secretary of State heard that question amidst the clubbable hubbub. It is very important that the question be heard, otherwise the hon. Lady will have to blurt it out again.

**Penny Mordaunt:** If this answer is not satisfactory because I did not hear the hon. Lady's question, please will she let me know? We are looking to refresh a number of schemes, including the International Citizen Service, and at what healthcare professionals and other professions can offer with regard to aid while enhancing their own personal professional development.

T8. [902654] **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I recently hosted a meeting with the China-Britain Council to explore opportunities for developing markets. What discussions are taking place between the Department for International Trade and DFID to ensure that trade joins aid as a way to help the developing world?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We have close discussions with our colleagues at the Department for International Trade. The trade and aid programme has enabled more than 40 countries to put development at the heart of their own plans.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I recently visited young Send My Friend to School campaigners at Sydenham School in my constituency. They spoke with great passion about the need for global education and why greater financing for education matters to them. What action will the Secretary of State take to ensure that this Government listen to those young people and show leadership by increasing funding for education through the Global Partnership for Education?

**Alistair Burt:** We were and are the largest founder contributor to the Global Partnership for Education. With 387 million children expected to leave primary school unable to read, there is no doubt that the continuing efforts of the United Kingdom, along with others in the partnership, are important. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said earlier, we will publish a refreshed education strategy early in the new year. The hon. Lady can be sure that strengthening education systems around the world, and supporting teachers and children who may be marginalised through missing out on education, will be key parts of that.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I recently visited some schools in Africa where, in classrooms of more than 100 pupils, those with special educational needs, right at the back, had very little chance of accessing education. How will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I congratulate her on her new position—prioritise disability support in education in developing countries?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this subject, which is very close to my heart. He will not have long to wait—perhaps it will be a matter of hours—for my first announcement on how the DFID budget will support disability.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [902632] **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 29 November.

**The First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Damian Green):** I have been asked to reply on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is abroad in the middle east furthering our interests in a region that is fundamental to our national security and prosperity.

1. [Official Report, 4 December 2017, Vol. 632, c. 3-4MC.]

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in offering our warmest congratulations to His Royal Highness Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, and in wishing them every happiness in the future.

Today also marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of the RAF. The whole House will want to express our thanks for a century of service to this country.

**Melanie Onn:** I add my congratulations to those of the First Secretary of State to Prince Harry on his engagement.

Thanks to the outstanding efforts of the Labour-run North East Lincolnshire Council, the Government have included the Greater Grimsby project in their industrial strategy document, but we need more than a byline in a glossy magazine to make its potential a reality. When can we expect the Government to put their money where their mouth is, so that we can get going?

**Damian Green:** I welcome the fact that the hon. Lady welcomes the industrial strategy, as she should do. It will be good for Grimsby and many other communities around this country, particularly those that may feel that they have been left behind in the past. I am happy to assure her that the industrial strategy will come with money attached, as she will have heard in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement.

Q5. [902637] **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Making a success of the South Tees mayoral development corporation is vital for Teesside, and I was delighted to welcome the Prime Minister to my constituency this summer. Will the First Secretary join me in recognising the scale of the opportunity represented by the MDC, agree that it offers a chance to redefine Teesside to the world and commit that the new money awarded in the Budget is only the start of the process of delivering on its huge potential for change?

**Damian Green:** I can see that my hon. Friend is getting the hang of questions already. I am happy to assure him that we are committed to working with him, and indeed with the Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, who is doing so much to help develop the area. We want to support him and the South Tees Development Corporation on the work they are doing on the long-term regeneration of the south Tees area. As he said, the Chancellor announced £123 million of new funding in the Budget, because we recognise the significant economic opportunities in the area.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Let me join the First Secretary of State in congratulating the RAF on its anniversary, and in congratulating Prince Harry and Meghan Markle on their engagement—that is one Anglo-American couple that we in the Opposition will be delighted to see holding hands. I am sure that Prince Harry, as the patron of Rugby League, will be joining all of us in supporting the England team in the world cup final on Saturday—I, for one, will of course be waving my St George's flag.

On a much sadder note, I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts to all those killed and injured in Friday's horrific attack on the mosque in north Sinai. It is a bitter reminder that the vast majority of the victims of jihadi terror are Muslims.

Before I get on with my questions, can I ask the First Secretary of State about a simple point of principle? Is he happy to be held to the same standards in government that he required of others while in opposition?

**Damian Green:** Yes, I am. I think that all Ministers should respect and obey the ministerial code, and I absolutely think that is a very important part of confidence in public life. I also echo the right hon. Lady's thoughts about the terrible events in Sinai. She might find it difficult to wave the St George's flag, but I will be doing so for the English rugby league team. *[Interruption.]* As a Welsh rugby fan, I might find it even more difficult than she does.

**Emily Thornberry:** The First Secretary of State looked rather perturbed at my line of questioning, but he does not need to worry; I really am not going there. I was merely wondering whether he remembered the question he asked at Prime Minister's questions almost 17 years ago, when John Prescott stood in for Tony Blair, and whether he could answer the same question today. The question was this:

“what percentage of the new nurses recruited in the past 12 months are now working full time?”—*[Official Report, 13 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 630.]*

**Damian Green:** I cannot remember asking that question, but I would love to know what the then Deputy Prime Minister answered. I am happy to assure the right hon. Lady that we have more nurses, more midwives and more doctors working in the health service now. The health service is performing more operations now, and certainly more than it was 17 years ago. In particular, in the Budget last week my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to announce more than £6 billion extra on health spending, which will make the health service even stronger in future than it is now.

**Emily Thornberry:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that response, but since he failed to answer my original question, I will do it for him. According to the Government's latest figures, more than 40% of newly recruited nurses are leaving full-time employment within their first year. It is not just new recruits who are quitting; the overall number of NHS nurses and health visitors is down by 1,500 this year. The numbers are now lower than when this Government came to office. Why does he think that so many nurses are leaving?

**Damian Green:** There are, as I say, more operations being done, and more nurses, more doctors, more midwives. The health service is expanding. We have got 14,900 more doctors, 1,500 more medical school places each year and 10,000 more nurses on our wards, and we have announced an increase of more than 5,000 extra nurse training places every year. In addition, the Chancellor said in his Budget that we would commit to making sure that the nurses' pay increase, the action for change—*[Interruption.]* The “Agenda for Change” staffing covered would not come out of other health spending. So nurses can be reassured that the Government will continue to support them both on pay and in terms of numbers. That is why our health service in England is getting better. If the right hon. Lady wants to look at a health service where things are getting worse, she can look to the Labour Government in Wales, and she does not

need to take it from me; she can take it from the public, because public satisfaction with the NHS in Wales is lower than in England. That is the effect of a Labour Government on health services.

**Emily Thornberry:** I hate to break it to the First Secretary, but there are more nurses in the NHS than just those working in emergency and acute wards, including district nurses, the number of whom has halved under the Tories. And guess who picks up the slack if those nurses are not there? It is nurses in emergency and acute care. I asked why so many nurses were leaving the vocation they loved. According to the Royal College of Nursing, the top four reasons are excess workload, staff shortages, low pay, and worries about patient care. According to the Government's own figures, the number of nurses quitting because of worries about their finances or health has doubled since the Tories first froze their pay. So let us get on to the question—the question he asked John Prescott 17 years ago. The First Secretary said then that nurses at his local hospital were warning that

“staff shortages are putting patients' lives at risk”—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 630.]

What are those same nurses telling him today?

**Damian Green:** Since 17 years ago—and it is interesting that 17 years ago many years of Labour Government still lay ahead, with all the pressures the right hon. Lady has just exposed—the number of nurses in post has risen significantly. I did not quite understand her point about wards—she seemed to go on and off the wards—but we know that we have 10,000 more nurses on our wards, which is where people want to see them. Also, if she is interested in nurses' pay, I hope that she will find it in herself to welcome the tax cut announced in the Budget—the increase in the personal allowance—which will help nurses, just as it will help workers across the public and private sectors. This is good news for nurses. The Budget was good not just for the health service but specifically for the nursing profession. As I say, I hope that she can bring herself to welcome that.

**Emily Thornberry:** I notice that the First Secretary did not want to talk about patient care at his local hospital. Could the reason be that his local accident and emergency department, according to the board's most recent minutes, has

“Severe staff shortages in medical and nursing staff”,

meaning that patient safety is being put at risk, and the only option to tackle those shortages is to cancel outpatient clinics? And it gets worse: there is to be a public meeting tomorrow to consider closing his local A&E for good—in other words, all the things he has been denying. What are you doing to our NHS? It is happening on your own doorstep. Is it not about time he got a grip?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am entirely innocent in this matter.

**Damian Green:** The right hon. Lady's grasp of the facts is pretty shaky. The meeting tomorrow in my constituency is about the strategic transformation plan. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Damian Green:** I am happy to assure the right hon. Lady that I am entirely in favour of option 1 of that strategic transformation plan, which suggests not just leaving A&E services in the hospital in my constituency, but actually expanding specialist services there. I strongly suggest that she does not try to think she knows more about what is going on my constituency than I do.

**Emily Thornberry:** I suspect that neither the nation nor the First Secretary's own constituents will have taken any reassurances from that answer. We have an NHS in the grip of a chronic funding and staffing crisis: GPs are quitting in record numbers; junior doctors are running A&E departments without supervision; our nurses are at breaking point—and all this is before the winter crisis that is coming. So let me finally ask him: what does it say about the Government's priorities that last week's Budget could only find £350 million to help the cash-strapped, stretched-to-the-limit NHS cope with the winter fuel crisis? [*Interruption.*] [HON. MEMBERS: “Keep going.”] Only £350 million to cope with the winter crisis, but it was able to find 11 times that amount to spend on a no-deal Brexit. Is that not the very definition of a Government who are fiddling away while the rest of the country burns?

**Damian Green:** The right hon. Lady is determined to talk the NHS down. It is a Conservative Government who are increasing NHS funding so that it remains the best health service in the world, as the independent Commonwealth Fund has described it for the second year in a row. It is this party that promised and delivered more money for the NHS in 2010 and 2015, and in last week's Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor promised it an extra £6.3 billion. That means more patients being treated, it means more operations being carried out by more doctors, and it means more nurses.

The right hon. Lady ended her remarks by saying that the Government were wasting £3 billion on preparing for Brexit. We now know that Labour Members do not think it is worth preparing for Brexit, but they do think it is worth preparing for a run on the pound. That is all we need to know about the Labour party.

Q11. [902643] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): This week one of Labour's last two remaining councillors in Boston crossed the floor to join the Conservative party. He said that he did not want to see the country go back to 1973. Will the First Secretary join me in welcoming this new member to the Conservative party, and does he agree that an open, optimistic Britain deserves better than reheated Marxism and Labour's bankrupt economy?

**Damian Green:** I am very happy to agree with my hon. Friend, and, indeed, with the wisdom of the Labour councillor who has joined the Conservative party. My hon. Friend is quite right. What we hear from Labour Members shows that a Labour Government would lose control of public finances and hike taxes to their highest ever peacetime level. I have discovered a new quotation—the shadow Chancellor called business “the enemy”. That is what the modern Labour party is about.

Let me also point out that the local councillor may just have moved in anticipation. I understand that moderate councillors are being deselected by the hard left of the Labour party.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I join the First Secretary in congratulating Prince Harry and Meghan on their engagement, and wish them a long life and happiness together? May I also welcome the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Right Reverend Derek Browning, who is with us in the Gallery today?

Will the First Secretary of State now tell the House how much money the UK Government have received from Saudi Arabia as a result of arms sales since the war in Yemen began?

**Damian Green:** I am afraid that I do not have the figure to hand. However, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to recognise that our defence industry is an extremely important creator of jobs and prosperity, in Scotland as well as in other parts of the country. Obviously I am aware of the current terrible situation in Yemen, but he should also recognise that this country has one of the most rigorous and robust defence sales regimes in the world, as was recognised in a court case last July—and we are absolutely determined to maintain the most rigorous and robust system because that is the right thing to do, both for our prosperity and to ensure that we keep proper control of arms sales.

**Ian Blackford:** That was a long time to be unable to answer the question. I can tell the First Secretary that the UK Government have received £4.6 billion from selling arms to Saudi Arabia since the war in Yemen began—a war that has created a devastating humanitarian crisis. Yemen is now on the brink of famine, and UNICEF has said that 150,000 children will die by the end of the year. Does the First Secretary not agree that the best thing the Prime Minister can do in her meetings today is follow the example of the Netherlands and suspend licences for arms sales to Saudi Arabia to stop killing children?

**Damian Green:** I should correct something the right hon. Gentleman said: that the Government receive the money. It will be the companies that receive the money, and therefore their workers. He can take that position if he wants, and it was the Labour party's position as well, but that would certainly entail significant job losses.

It is very important not only that we have the robust regime I talked about, but that we continue the humanitarian efforts that we make to try to alleviate the terrible conditions in Yemen. We are the fourth largest humanitarian donor to Yemen, and the second largest to the UN appeal. I also remind the right hon. Gentleman that the involvement of the Saudis in this conflict came at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen and has UN Security Council backing. That is why we support it. This is a conflict supported by the UN Security Council, and I would hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have some respect for the Security Council.

Q14. [902646] **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): This Government's ambition to build more homes is welcome, especially among those struggling to get on the housing ladder, and Taunton Deane is playing its part. With its garden town status, we must have homes that are good places to live—energy-efficient, sustainable drainage, green spaces, and maybe even, Mr Speaker, where there are showers, no shower gels with microbeads. However, we must also have the right roads in these developments. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the

housing infrastructure fund is key to unlocking funds for vital roads such as the spine road through Staplegrove in Taunton?

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I know what a stout champion she is of the people of Taunton Deane. She is right about the housing infrastructure fund as well. We need more homes, but we also need the infrastructure to back them up, and that is why the Chancellor doubled the housing infrastructure fund in the Budget.

Q2. [902633] **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): As the First Secretary of State will know, being my near neighbour in Kent, as a result of underfunding the Conservative county council has run out of cash and is cutting the funding of buses in Kent by 70%. Four hospital buses, 14 school buses and over 100 other routes are to be cut. Thousands of pensioners, especially in rural areas, are to be trapped at home. Does the right hon. Gentleman, the Member for Ashford, really support such cuts?

**Damian Green:** I do not recognise the characterisation of Kent County Council's position that my constituency neighbour has expressed. All local authorities, as all parts of the public sector, have to live within their means, because we have to continue paying down the deficit run up by the previous Labour Government. Kent County Council is an extremely good county council that does many good things in transport and other fields for the people of Kent, and will continue to do so.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for decades now, the richer member states in the European Union have made large contributions to the EU budget because the macroeconomic benefits of belonging to the large free trade area of the single market make it a bargain to pay that share of the costs? Should we not therefore welcome the rumours in today's press of a possible imminent settlement of the method of calculating future contributions, which may now enable us to get on with the serious negotiations about how we retain the maximum future access to all those benefits of that free trade?

**Damian Green:** My right hon. and learned Friend has been around long enough to know not necessarily to believe everything he reads in the newspapers, and it would clearly be wrong for me to go into figures now, but he is absolutely right that what we are about, and what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union is about, is making sure we get the best possible deal at this stage of the process, so we can move on to the trade talks. Britain, as a country that meets its international obligations, of course will, as it exits the EU, meet the obligations and have all the rights that we have in that process, so that we can maintain a deep and special partnership with the other 27 members of the EU, as we move forward in friendship and co-operation after we have left the EU.

Q3. [902634] **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Being believed, reliving trauma, fear of publicity, and a culture of denial are some of the reasons why very many women are reluctant to report rape, assault and sexual harassment. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that Government and Parliament need to lead by example? Will he, on behalf of the Government, apologise to the victims that Parliament and the Government have been letting down?

**Damian Green:** I absolutely agree that this place as an institution and all the political parties need to improve complaints procedures and other aspects of the culture of politics to ensure that young men and young women who are interested in politics do not in any way feel deterred from playing an active role in it. There is a place for everyone in this House, on all sides and in all parties, and among the House authorities, to ensure that this is the best possible working environment for young people to come into.

**Ms Nadine Dorries** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): Many mothers in this Chamber know how hard childbirth can be, but we would never use that knowledge in a veiled threat against a journalist, in the way that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) did when being questioned by a Channel 4 journalist recently. As I assume that the First Secretary is not pregnant, will he please complete the work that that journalist tried to do, by asking the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn to use her influence with her aunt, who is the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, whose regime is responsible for the kidnapping of Ahmad Bin Quasem, to ask for his release?

**Damian Green** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the First Secretary replies, I am sure that the—*[Interruption.]* Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries) notified the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) of an intention to refer to her in this question—

**Ms Dorries** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** She did not? Well, that was disorderly—*[Interruption.]* Order. Nevertheless, the question has been asked and it would be perfectly proper for the First Secretary briefly to reply.

**Damian Green:** Mr Speaker, you and the House will be aware that I can speak only on behalf of the Government. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries) that Bangladesh remains an important human rights priority area for the Foreign Office and that we continue to raise allegations of enforced disappearances at all levels of the Government of Bangladesh. I think I should stop there.

Q4. [902635] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): At the present rate of progress, it will take the three officials at the First Secretary's old Department more than 70 years to investigate the claims of around 4,500 WASPI women who are being deprived of their state pension. I know that this Government are slow, but is this not adding insult to injury?

**Damian Green:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government committed a sum of more than £1 billion to ensure that no one's pension would be delayed more than 18 months from the original period. I am sure that he also, as a reasonable man, recognises that, with increasing longevity, it is inevitable that the pension age will rise. That is what this Government are doing, and by next year pension inequality will have been removed. We will hit 65 for both sexes next year, and that means that we will then have an equal pension system.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Royal Air Force is unique among the three services in having been established by an Act of Parliament, which received Royal Assent 100 years ago today. Will my right hon. Friend find time in his busy diary to join me and Members of both Houses and staff from throughout the Palace in celebrating the magnificent service that the RAF has given to this nation over that 100 years, at a unique parade in the atrium of Portcullis House at 7.30 this evening by the Queen's Colour Squadron?

**Damian Green:** I have already mentioned the centenary today, and my hon. Friend is right to bring it up again. We cannot pay high enough tribute to the men and women of the RAF for a century of service that will go on for a long time into the future as well. I am glad that he has managed to get an advert in for the parade this evening in Portcullis House.

Q6. [902638] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The United Kingdom has lost its seat on the International Court of Justice, EU agencies are pulling out of London, and there will be no more European capitals of culture in the UK. Is the sun setting on empire 2.0 before it has even begun?

**Damian Green:** It is not really surprising that EU institutions are not going to be in a state that is not a member of the EU. That cannot come as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman. As for the capitals of culture, I rather agree with him. After British cities, including some in Scotland, were invited to be part of the process, it is extremely disappointing that the Commission has decided that they cannot apply. We are in urgent talks with the Commission about that, and we are ensuring that all the cities that applied can continue with their cultural development, which has been shown to be an extremely good basis for the regeneration of cities and towns across the United Kingdom.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): This Saturday, I will be announcing the winners of my annual local shop competition as part of Small Business Saturday. Will my right hon. Friend wish all Cannock Chase retailers the best of luck and will he congratulate the winners?

**Damian Green:** I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating her retailers. Like many Members, I will be celebrating Small Business Saturday this weekend. It has become an extremely important part of the calendar. Supporting small business is absolutely at the heart of this Government's economic strategy, and we should take every opportunity to celebrate the hugely important work that small businesses do in innovation, in entrepreneurship and in serving the people.

Q7. [902639] **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): Today, we see shocking new figures that child knife deaths are nearing a 40-year high. The Prime Minister promised action five months ago, but she has failed to deliver. There was nothing in the Budget for policing and nothing meaningful to tackle the causes as well as the crime. It is clear that we need intervention now and not just from the Home Office. Funding youth workers in major trauma centres is proven to get young people out of the cycle of violence, and it would cost £6 million a

year to fund. Will the First Secretary establish a cross-Government programme of action to make good on the Prime Minister's promise?

**Damian Green:** I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware that this Government's stance on knife crime is actually tougher than ever. We have made the punishment for repeat offenders stronger, and we have banned cautions for the most serious offences. There is now a very clear message: if you carry knives in public, you are more likely than ever to go to prison. The latest figures show that 42% of adult offenders were given an immediate custodial sentence—the highest rate in nearly a decade—so I hope that she can be reassured that this Government are actually being tougher on knife crime than any previous Government.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Does the First Secretary agree that we do not need to break into the computer or iPad of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) to work out that the half a trillion pounds that he wants to borrow will attract £7.5 billion of interest payments every year?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The one difficulty with that otherwise ingenious question is that it bears no relation to Government policy, for which the First Secretary is responsible, and relates instead to the policies of the shadow Chancellor, for which he is not.

Q8. [902640] **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Sharon Jones is a constituent who had a malignant brain tumour removed some 20 years ago, leaving her with excruciating headaches and severe pain in her neck and shoulders. Sharon has been in receipt of employment and support allowance, and the Department for Work and Pensions accepts that Sharon is not fit for work. However, she has now been placed in the work-related activity group and her benefit has been reduced. Will the First Secretary justify that to Sharon?

**Damian Green:** Obviously, I cannot be aware of the individual issues in that case, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will be happy to consider that case to see whether something needs to be done for Sharon.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): I very much welcome the announcement of the borderlands growth deal, which is positive news for the border area. Can the First Secretary assure me that this initiative will receive sufficient resource to ensure its success?

**Damian Green:** I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for the borderlands growth initiative. I have seen the many benefits of city deals and growth deals around all parts of the United Kingdom since I became First Secretary. The borderlands growth initiative is particularly important because it will show the mutual prosperity of his part of the north of England and the southern part of Scotland. All I can say is that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is the MP for a constituency in the southern part of Scotland, I know this deal will get particularly strict attention inside the Cabinet.

Q9. [902641] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Does the First Secretary agree with the Lord Speaker's committee that the House of Lords should be reduced to 600 and that the term should be limited to 15 years? Does he not feel the slightest sense of embarrassment that the crisis of credibility in the undemocratic upper Chamber has become so acute that its Members are themselves begging for reform while the elected Government refuse to act?

**Damian Green:** When the hon. Gentleman says that all Members of the House of Lords are begging for reform, he may not necessarily be representing the entire range of views in another place, but I am happy to assure him that the Government are looking very carefully at the proposal of the Burns committee. We will, of course, respond in due course.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour say what action the Government propose to take against Russian-backed agencies that are spreading fake news and disinformation? We know they have been doing it in our political campaigns, but there are also worrying reports that disinformation may be being spread on important issues such as accessing vaccines and the flu jab.

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend is right to raise cyber-security, which is an extremely important issue, and fake news and the dissemination of potentially dangerous information is one part of that. The National Cyber Security Centre is looking very hard at the issue, and it is taking a number of measures to combat it, some of which obviously have to remain private. I absolutely assure him that the issue is very high on the agenda of the National Cyber Security Centre, which is just over a year old and which is doing very good work in ensuring that the whole area of cyber-security is much better than it used to be.

Q10. [902642] **Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): An 11-year-old primary school pupil approached me to tell me that he, his mother and his two brothers live in a single room in a bedsit in Ilford and to ask whether I could find him a council flat like the one in which I grew up. What is heartbreaking is that I know, and the First Secretary will know, it is very unlikely he will ever have one. Given that the measures announced in last week's so-called housing Budget will not solve the scale of the problem that sees more than 100,000 children living in temporary accommodation, what will the First Secretary do to make sure that that boy, his family and every other child living in a bedsit or in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation gets the decent home they need and that they can call their own?

**Damian Green:** I absolutely agree that this is a serious problem, and it is one of the reasons why housing was at the centre of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget.

**Emily Thornberry:** What are you doing, then?

**Damian Green:** I see the right hon. Lady has recovered her voice. I will tell her what we are doing. Last year we delivered more homes than were delivered in all but one

of the last 30 years—217,000, which takes us to 1.1 million since 2010. Over the next five years we will invest £44 billion in home building, boosting the funding for council, social and low-cost housing to over £9 billion. We are building more social housing than the Labour Government did in their 13 years in office. We will build even more in the future. This is a Government who are addressing the problems of the constituents of the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting); previous Labour Governments signally failed to do so.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): At the recent extremely successful Cheltenham literature festival, Hillary Clinton talked about the importance of ensuring that the Russians are not allowed to meddle in British or, indeed, American elections. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should be building an offensive cyber capability so that our opponents know we have the will and the wherewithal to strike back?

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend is exactly right, as we would expect, given that he is the Member of Parliament who represents GCHQ; he is absolutely right about the offensive capacity we may well need in the cyber area, and I am happy to assure him and the House that we are indeed developing that.

Q12. [902644] **Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Without mentioning the new state pension or apprenticeships, without stating the falsehood that the Scottish Government can somehow fix the problem, and given that the Prime Minister is a WASPI woman herself, how can the First Minister justify a rise of 413% in the number of women over the age of 60 in receipt of employment and support allowance because of this Government's refusal to give them their pensions?

**Damian Green:** I said this in reply to a previous question on this subject, but I hope the hon. Lady would recognise the principle, which is right: that as we live longer we need to move up the pension age. She knows as well as I do that the Scottish Government do have the capacity to top up welfare payments. Scottish National party Members like to sit here and deny that, but in Holyrood they know they could do this. So, as ever with the SNP, they should stop simply moaning in this Chamber; they should go back to their own Government in Scotland and say that if they want to do something, they should do it. They should get on with the day job of running Scotland.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I very much welcome the Government's modern industrial strategy, which was launched this week. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is really going to be important, as this country moves forward and we seek a global Britain, in creating more and better-quality jobs?

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend is exactly right; the point about the industrial strategy, which is a hugely important moment, is to create not just a stronger economy but a fairer economy for decades to come. That is why it is looking forward to 2030; it is a long-term attempt to make sure that we have not just a global, outward looking economy—I completely agree on that—but a modern economy where we can capitalise on our huge research strengths and our huge intellectual

strengths to make sure that, unlike so often in the past, we benefit commercially from that for decades to come. That is the route to rising productivity and rising prosperity.

Q13. [902645] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): This Sunday, 3 December, is the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities. So far, the Government have refused to carry out a cumulative impact assessment of their social security policies on people living with a disability. Will the First Secretary now mark this day by doing the right thing for disabled people and carrying out a full cumulative impact assessment?

**Damian Green:** I am sure the hon. Lady, who has great expertise in this field, will know that this Government are spending £90 billion on disability benefits. More to the point, we are being more successful than ever before in giving disabled people a degree of independence. Hundreds of thousands more disabled people are in work than have ever been before. We have a plan to have an extra million in work over the next 10 years. That is an extremely important and practical way to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of disabled people. That is what this Government are doing, and that is what we will continue to do.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): Given that President Rouhani of Iran has said that his will not be the first country to breach the joint comprehensive plan of action, will the First Secretary assure us that British diplomats are working hard in Washington DC to persuade our American friends that it is in the interests of the west and of Iran to uphold the JCPOA as an essential prelude to solving other regional problems?

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend is right; we think that the JCPOA is a very important part of attempting to improve conditions, not just between Iran and its neighbours but across the wider middle east. We will continue to argue that case in all parts of the world.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): I, too, join in offering congratulations to Prince Harry and Meghan Markle on their engagement. One issue that Prince Harry has rightly highlighted and campaigned on is mental health. The Invest in Life campaign in Northern Ireland is doing a fantastic job in highlighting the need for extra resources on that issue. We join in that campaign and have secured extra resources. But at a time when issues such as mental health, education and all the rest of it need to be prioritised in Northern Ireland by a locally devolved Government working on these issues and representing the people of Northern Ireland, does the First Secretary agree that it is a gross dereliction of responsibility for Sinn Féin to announce this week that it is not going to engage in further discussions on the restoration of devolution? If that is the case, we now need to move quickly to restore accountability and Ministers to Northern Ireland to get on with the people's business of responsible government in Northern Ireland.

**Damian Green:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working as hard as possible to restore democratic control and to restore the Northern Ireland Executive. We all want to see proper devolved government restored in Northern Ireland. That would be by far the best thing for the people of Northern Ireland, and the Government will continue to work tirelessly to that end.

## Points of Order

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Exceptionally, I will take the point of order now. *[Interruption.]* Will Members who are leaving the Chamber be good enough to do so quickly and quietly? It is quite unaccountable if they do not wish to hear the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), but there is no accounting for taste.

**Stephen Doughty:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for exceptionally taking this point of order.

You and others in the House may not be aware of this, Mr Speaker, but it appears that the President of the United States has in recent moments been retweeting comments from a far-right organisation, Britain First. There are some highly inflammatory videos, including some posted by an individual who I believe has recently been arrested and charged in relation to certain serious offences. Have you had notice of any intended statement by the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary on this very serious matter?

**Mr Speaker:** I confess I have had no advance notice of this matter. I am not myself one who tends to follow what is said on Twitter, but the hon. Gentleman is almost invariably very well informed on these matters. The Home Secretary is in her place and if she wants to say anything, she is welcome to do so, but she is under absolutely no obligation whatsoever to do so.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd)** *indicated dissent.*

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** The right hon. Lady is not hailing a taxi. Oh, very well—in deference to the seniority of the right hon. Lady in the House, if she has a point of order to raise, I will of course hear it.

**Yvette Cooper:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that the woman in question has indeed already been convicted of hate crime in this country. On that basis, given the significance and seriousness of the President of the United States giving her such a huge platform, do you think it would be appropriate for us to hear some word of condemnation from the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, it is a point of order for the Chair, and I can say only to the right hon. Lady that, at the moment, as will be obvious to her and to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth, I have received no advance notice of any intention to make a statement. It would be wrong to expect a Government Minister immediately to respond and, to be fair, the Home Secretary is under no obligation to do so. What I would say is that I now know the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth very well and, if anything, I know the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) even better, because we came into the House together 20 years ago. Knowing them as well as I do, I know that when they have got their teeth into something, they are disinclined to let go. By the way, that is a compliment. We will leave it there for now, but I rather imagine that this matter will probably be mentioned again.

## Exiting the EU: Costs

12.48 pm

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to update the House on the expected costs of exiting the European Union.

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):** Our negotiating team is currently in Brussels discussing our exit from the European Union—in fact, our officials have been working on it for months. It would be completely wrong of me to cut across those discussions by commenting on speculation about the financial settlement, and it would not be in our national interest.

The Prime Minister made it clear in her Florence speech that EU member states would not need to pay more, or to receive less money, over the remainder of the current budget period as a result of our decision to leave. She also made it clear that, in the spirit of our future partnership, the UK will honour its commitments made during its period of membership. As we have said before, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Any settlement that we make is contingent on us securing a suitable outcome, as outlined by the Prime Minister in her Florence speech. We will meet our commitments and also get a good deal for the UK taxpayer.

We want to see progress towards our preferred option, which is an implementation period followed by an ambitious future economic partnership. In the Budget, we have set aside £3 billion, in addition to the £700 million that we have already allocated, to make sure that our country is fully prepared for all eventualities. What we have seen today is simply media speculation. We will update the House when there is more detail to give.

**Mr Leslie:** The British people were promised a dividend from Brexit. They were told that leaving the EU would save us a fortune. Those who campaigned for Brexit daubed their hubris across the side of a giant red bus, promising a windfall of £350 million every week for the NHS. That was not just a whopping lie, but the direct opposite of the truth.

Will the Chief Secretary confirm that if the divorce bill comes in at somewhere between £40 billion and £67 billion, as is speculated, that could be a payment of £1,000 from every man, woman and child in this country? Is this speculated divorce bill not just the tip of the iceberg? If we are being honest about the true costs of Brexit, should we not also add in the lost revenues to the Exchequer set out in the Red Book—something in the order of £20 billion by 2021—the £3.7 billion of Brexit preparations for all the duplicated agencies, new border arrangements, lorry parks in Dover and so forth, and of course the higher cost of living for all of our constituents as prices keep on rising?

How do the Chief Secretary's constituents react to the idea that they will be lumbered with all these extra costs? Do they not ask her, "What exactly are we getting for this? What wondrous new advantages will we gain by shelling out these astronomical sums?" Will she not be straight with the House that we are paying for the privilege of putting the world's most efficient free trade, tariff-free, frictionless agreement into the bin, and being told to pay for the privilege of downgrading to an

inferior deal with our European neighbours? Why is she being so coy about the deal that is being done? The Government have gone from "go whistle" to "where do we sign?"

In a week when the Government will still not fully publish the Brexit impact assessment papers to this House, we are now hearing rumours that Parliament and the public may never be told the full amount. When will Parliament be told what is actually happening and will we get a vote on the sums of money involved? Will the Chief Secretary, right here and right now, scotch this nonsense that the true costs of Brexit will be hidden away in a convenient backroom deal in the negotiations? The British people need to know whether there is a deal and how much the Government have put on the table in the negotiations. If she will not tell us, why does she think that the only people who cannot be told are the British public and the British Parliament? This is not what the British public voted for in the referendum. It is not taking back control; it is losing control.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman what my constituents say: "The country has voted to leave the European Union." What they want to see is us getting on with that and securing the best possible deal for Britain. If we look at the Opposition Benches, we can see Members who, like the hon. Gentleman, voted to stay in the single market and the customs union, and we also see Opposition Front Benchers who voted to leave the single market and the customs union. Today we read that the shadow Home Secretary wants a second referendum. That is not remotely helpful in securing the best possible deal.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we are in negotiations as we speak. If we were to talk about numbers and aspects of the deal in this House, we would be cutting across our negotiating position. The people of Britain want us to get on with it, to take the advantages of leaving the European Union, to make the most of the opportunities and to secure the best possible deal. We are well on the way to doing that. I suggest that, rather than trying to refight the referendum battle, which is exactly what the hon. Gentleman seems to be doing, he needs to get with the programme and to start talking about how he can be helpful.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that no Government of any EU member state could possibly be expected to agree that we should have a good future trade and economic relationship with the European Union while, at the same time, we repudiate all our past financial obligations and somehow refuse to pay a fair share of the costs of agencies and so on that will be incurred in the future? Does she therefore agree that those who oppose paying any money presumably want a no-deal Brexit, which would be catastrophic for this country, and would stop the opportunity that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has of negotiating a deal that retains as many benefits as possible for jobs, investment and the growth of this country's economy?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As the Prime Minister laid out in her Florence speech, we do want to abide by the commitments we made during our period of membership, and we also want to see progress on securing a deal. My right hon.

[Elizabeth Truss]

and learned Friend is right that any settlement that we seek to achieve has to be contingent on getting a suitable outcome from the negotiations, as has been outlined by the Prime Minister, because we want to ensure that any money spent is value for money for the British taxpayer.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) for raising this critical question.

As we all know, settling this issue is vital to continuing to the next part of the negotiations. Given that progress has been so much slower than we would have hoped, the Opposition support efforts to resolve this part of the negotiations as soon as is feasible, so that we can start to make progress to end the uncertainty that is impacting on jobs and the economy.

The financial settlement with the EU must meet our international obligations while delivering a fair deal for British taxpayers. The UK is a responsible country and there is no mileage in our refusing to meet our obligations. If we are to negotiate a comprehensive new trade agreement with the European Union, which we will need for future jobs and prosperity, we must be seen as a country that can be trusted to comply with the deals that we reach.

Given our long-standing membership of the European Union, the calculation will understandably be complex. Given that this is a sensitive part of the negotiations, we appreciate that the Government cannot announce a figure publicly at this stage, but they must be transparent about the process, especially once an understanding has been reached with our EU partners. That is why we have tabled an amendment to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill that calls for any financial settlement to be assessed by the Office for Budget Responsibility and the National Audit Office, and for Parliament to have the chance to scrutinise it. The Government's handling of the presentation of the impact assessment studies to Parliament has left a lot to be desired, so may I ask the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to promise that, in the interests of transparency and clarity, the Government will support that amendment?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his supportive comments. I am glad that he agrees with the Government's strategy. The next step will be making sure that his Back-Bench colleagues also agree with his strategy. He is absolutely right that we should not reveal the details of negotiations while they are ongoing. However, the Opposition's approach of saying that any deal is better than no deal is not the best way of securing a deal. Although our preferred option is an implementation period followed by a strong agreement, we are preparing for all eventualities, which is why we are putting in £3 billion. I suggest that the Opposition should also support that very responsible approach.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I am not in favour of anything that is not legal, so I support my right hon. Friend completely. I am also in line with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), in that whatever the legal agreement is, bound against the contingency of a free trade arrangement, it is exactly what the Government will set out to do. Will the Chief Secretary please remind those who have raised this question that even if

we agreed a figure of something in the order of £40 billion over 40 years, because we will not be paying contributions to the European Union, it means that the UK Exchequer will be better off by £360 million in the course of those 40 years—a net gain, with a free trade arrangement?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My right hon. Friend makes a very fair point. Whatever happens, we will not be paying anything like what we would have paid as an EU member. That represents a considerable saving to the British taxpayer.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) for bringing this matter to the House.

There would be no newspaper rumours about the sum if the Government actually told us what the sum was. Nobody voted for this disastrous, disorganised EU exit. People voted for £350 million a week for the NHS, not to spend £40 billion or £50 billion just to be worse off. Our public services must not pay the price for this Brexit mess. It surprised us all when the Prime Minister found a magic money tree earlier this year, so surely the Government cannot have been lucky enough to find two. Given that last week's Budget did not make provision for this £40 billion or £50 billion, will the Chancellor now bring forward an emergency Budget to explain where he is finding the money?

**Elizabeth Truss:** When the hon. Lady stood up, I thought that she was going to thank the Government for the £2 billion additional spending power that we gave to the Scottish Government in the Budget, which they will no doubt be able to use to improve their public services. As I have said before—and, indeed, as has been pointed out by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds)—talking about the money now would cut across the negotiations and prevent us from getting the best possible deal. That is not in anyone's interests.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I am glad that the Government have confirmed today that they are carrying on with comprehensive preparations for no deal, because it is very important that we are not up against the clock at the end and forced into a bad deal because we have no alternative. Will the Chief Secretary confirm that no deal has the great advantage of no payments whatever under the divorce bill heading, meaning that when the Government recommend a deal, it has to be visibly better?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My right hon. Friend is correct. It is irresponsible for Opposition Front Benchers to suggest that any deal is better than no deal. That is the way that we will not get our preferred option, which is an implementation period plus our preferred economic partnership. We are allocating £3 billion to ensure that we are prepared for all eventualities.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The United Kingdom is currently a member of a large number of EU agencies, from that dealing with aviation safety to the European Medicines Agency. Have the Government made an assessment of the likely cost to the Exchequer of having to replicate all those functions and activities, if they eventually decide that we have to leave all of them

because of their stated principled objection to the European Court of Justice having any jurisdiction over the United Kingdom?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I have been very clear with the House that we are preparing for all eventualities. Of course, looking at the specifics of those agencies is a part of that.

**Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con):** As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the Prime Minister made a fair and generous offer to the European Union in her Florence speech. Given that article 50 provides that the negotiations that are under way should take account of the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is high time that the European Union reciprocated and started adhering to its obligations under the treaty?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As my right hon. Friend points out, it is important that we move on to the next stage of the negotiations and talk about our long-term relationship with the European Union once we have left. That is exactly what we seek to do.

**Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab):** The problem with the Chief Secretary's answer is that all our constituents saw the slogan on the side of a bus. If the Government simply say nothing—if they keep radio silence for a long time—and then suddenly pluck a figure out of a hat at the end of the process, it will just be incomprehensible to everyone. Surely she can tell the House the kinds of things that the Government think they should be funding—pension contributions or whatever else—rather than just leaving everyone in the dark.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I refer the right hon. Lady to the Prime Minister's Florence speech, in which she laid out the commitments that we want to continue to honour, in the spirit of our future partnership, after we have left the European Union. The right hon. Lady has to be aware that this is part of a discussion that is also about our future relationship, and all those elements are contingent on securing our future relationship, as the Prime Minister laid out in her Florence speech. It would be wrong at this stage—from the point of view of not only the negotiations, but transparency to the public—to lay out something before it is fully agreed. That would not be helpful.

**Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con):** To cheer up the miseries on the Opposition Benches, perhaps they would like to look at the prospective budget published by Economists for Free Trade in the week before the Budget. It is a really exciting prospectus that says that our economy will grow at 3% a year by 2025, providing an infrastructure surplus of £60 billion, which easily covers the £18.2 billion a year for the famous £350 million. But that is contingent on reciprocal free trade with zero tariffs, so will my right hon. Friend guarantee that there will be no legally binding commitment to spend money until our partners agree to a serious free trade deal that is based on reciprocal free trade and zero tariffs?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I fear that my right hon. Friend is over-optimistic if he thinks we can stop Opposition Members from being miserable. We tried that over four days of Budget debate, but we have been unsuccessful

so far. He is absolutely right to talk about the benefits of free trade for the British economy—I completely agree with him. We are seeking a good deal that benefits the UK in the long term.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** At least £45 billion, higher inflation and debt, an extra year of cuts, and less influence in the world are the price that the Government are willing to pay for a deluded vision of Great Britain post Brexit. Is there any level of damage that the economy, jobs and families in the UK would have to sustain that would cause the Government to rethink and give the people a vote on the deal? That would be supported by the Liberal Democrats and Sadiq Khan, the London Mayor—and, as I understand it now, the shadow Home Secretary.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I see, regrettably, that the misery has spread to the Liberal Democrats; there seems to be a contagion on the Opposition Benches. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to welcome the fact that this country has the lowest unemployment in 40 years. We also have the third highest number of start-ups in the world—a record number for this country—and the other positive benefits that we are seeing due to the actions of this Conservative Government.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** Most of us—certainly those of us on the Conservative Benches—accept that a good trade deal is better than no deal, that there is always give and take in a negotiation, and that it is important that we meet our financial commitments. However, does the Minister accept that this issue is largely a storm in a teacup, because nothing is agreed until everything is agreed? It is important to make that point and not to listen to the few siren voices who still refuse to accept the result of the referendum.

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is right. Regrettably, there are people—particularly on the Opposition Benches—who still do not seem to accept democracy and that fact that people did vote to leave the European Union.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** The thing is that the Government are keeping their cards so close to their chest that I suspect they have not even looked at them themselves. For that matter, the left hand certainly does not know what the right hand is doing, because the Minister is obviously making it clear that we are going to pay lots of money for a no-deal outcome, yet the Foreign Secretary boldly and quite confidently told this House that our foreign counterparts could “go whistle”. What was he suggesting that they should whistle—“Stand and deliver your money or your life”?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that considerable work is taking place across Government, but it would be wrong to cut across our negotiators in the deal they are seeking to strike. It is in our country's interests to reach the point where we are talking about our long-term economic relationship with the European Union.

**Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** My right hon. Friend should not pay more than we owe, but she should be confident that, whatever that is, it is a bargain against the cost of staying in.

**Elizabeth Truss:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point. Were we to stay in, the costs would be considerably higher than any amount we are talking about as part of our negotiations.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The Government are so intent on keeping information they have about Brexit secret that they are actually risking contempt of Parliament. As this even more secret financial settlement is negotiated, how can we be sure that it really represents the national interest?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As I have pointed out already, these negotiations are not yet complete—there is not a number that we can disclose to the House. Absolutely, when there is one, and when there is more detail to give, we will come to the House and talk about it.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, following a good Budget, and given the need for good housekeeping and the pressures on public spending, if the impression is given that we have wads of cash when it comes to Europe, that undermines our arguments on the public sector and on the need for good housekeeping, especially since the House of Lords says that we have no legal financial obligations? Does she not also agree that this is not a divorce bill? We are leaving a club, and once someone leaves a club, they no longer have to pay subscriptions.

**Elizabeth Truss:** First, we were able to make sure that we stuck within our fiscal rules at the Budget, making sure that debt is falling as a proportion of GDP for the first time in 13 years, and keeping within our deficit targets. At the same time, we were able to freeze fuel duty to help ordinary working people, who need to keep their living costs down. We were able to do all those things. The reality is that, as we leave the European Union, we will no longer be paying those vast sums in, and that will represent a benefit to the taxpayer.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Minister aware that 70% of the people who voted in Bolsover voted to leave? But let me also say this to her: those same people in Bolsover, I believe, would expect me to tell the right hon. Lady from the finance Department that if the Government have £60 billion to spare, it should go to the national health service and social care.

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that, as part of last week's Budget, we were able to put additional money into the national health service—into hospital capital and making sure we hit our A&E targets—and we are also allocating money to help with nurses' pay. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be pleased about that.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): These negotiations remind me of the even more complex ones on arms reductions in the 1980s. Will the Minister bear it in mind that the lessons of those negotiations were, first, that too many one-sided concessions project an image of weakness and, secondly, that to get the very best deal, we often have to walk away first and wait for the other side to agree with us, come back, sit down and negotiate realistically?

**Elizabeth Truss:** It is because we need to make sure that the European Union is aware we have alternatives that we are preparing not only for our preferred option of a transition period plus a long-term economic agreement,

but for a no-deal scenario. The Opposition want to give that option away, so we would not be able to have that discussion with the European Union.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): There are two salient features about the news that is emerging. The first is that this is the opposite of what was promised during the referendum. We were promised £350 million a week more, and now the Government are set to pay up to £50 billion, when our constituents urgently need money for health, housing, policing and much more. But, secondly, what is it that we are paying for? Other countries pay significant sums to get into the single market; we are lining up to pay up to £50 billion to leave the single market. Is not the tragedy that these huge sums are going to pay for a worse deal than we have at present? That is hardly strategic genius.

**Elizabeth Truss:** It is absolutely right that the UK honours its commitments in the spirit of our future partnership, but as I have said before, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. We will expect to make progress and secure that long-term economic partnership, which will be to the benefit of UK citizens.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend note the growing concern at the fact that Her Majesty's Government seem in these negotiations to be dancing to the tune of the European Commission? Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), may I also ask whether she can be certain that, after 29 March 2019, we will make no payments to the European Union whatever in the absence of a full agreement covering trade?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can assure my hon. Friend that we are not dancing to anyone's tune. What we care about is the future of Britain's economy, protecting the British taxpayer from excess payments and making sure we secure a good deal, which is why it is so important that we do not discuss these numbers while we are in the middle of a very important negotiation.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I have been informed by a former public finances auditor that international accounting standard 37, on provisions, contingent liabilities and contingent assets, requires the UK Government to account for the divorce payment as expenditure in their public finances—even if the exact amount cannot be calculated. Given that the Government accounts for 2016-17 did not adequately disclose the potential liability, as required by IAS 37, will the Minister give assurances that a liability of this magnitude will now be included in the supplementary estimates for 2017-18 and that that provision will be subject to a vote of this House?

**Elizabeth Truss:** That would be wrong according to accounting principles, because nothing has been agreed. The Office for Budget Responsibility followed the Prime Minister's Florence speech in laying out its projections for the Budget. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he has misinterpreted those standards.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that she agrees that the UK should pay the EU what we are legally obliged to pay—not a penny

more and not a penny less? If so, will she make sure that, before this House votes on the final bill, we have an itemised account of exactly what we are paying for at the end, and also the legal basis on which we are making those payments? I have to say that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) is absolutely right: if there is any spare money going at a time of austerity, it should be directed to our priorities in the UK; we should not give it as a bung to the European Union, which we are not legally obliged to do.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to get the best possible deal for the British taxpayer, and we need to look at the deal in the round to see what represents value for money. Absolutely, the money should be spent on our public services and on keeping taxes low for our hard-working citizens.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Last week, the Treasury published the Red Book, which showed that there would be no more payments to EU institutions from 2019. It also said there was £15 billion of headroom and that debt would then fall. Does the news overnight not show that there is a £30 billion hole in the public finances and that there is no possibility of debt falling on that timescale?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Lady is not correct about that. The OBR has made predictions on EU payments and those are included in the Budget. Indeed, that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) in the Budget debate last week.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary please confirm that any payments that are offered will be itemised, so that Parliament can understand the constitution of the payment and put it into the context of any likely conditioning that may be required in any deal on the future relationship?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I assure my hon. Friend that the payments that will potentially be made—as we have discussed, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed—will absolutely provide value for money.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) is right in his question to highlight the serious difficulties the country faces. I hope it is true that agreement has been reached on the costs of exit, so that the negotiations can move on to the next stage. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is essential to the UK's national interest that the European Council agrees at its meeting next month that enough progress has been made to move on to discussions about future trade?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We absolutely want to secure movement on to the next stage of the negotiations. That is very important. Ultimately, it takes the UK and the EU27 to agree on that. It would be wrong to take the approach of the Opposition and say that we would agree to any deal, regardless of what it was. We have to look at and prepare for all eventualities.

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the message to the doom-mongers must be that the British public have

given their verdict and expect Parliament to deliver? The doom-mongers should recognise that we are the fifth strongest economy in the world and that our population is significantly greater than that of 15 EU countries put together. It is high time that they started talking Britain up, rather than talking it down.

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition refuse to see any of the positive things that are happening in our country, whether it is the lowest youth unemployment rate for over 13 years or the highest number of new start-ups this country has ever seen. Great things are happening, so let us see a bit more optimism from the Opposition.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): People in the Black country voted to leave, but they were not told at any point that it could cost them £1 billion a week. They certainly were not told that it could make them worse off. If it is the case, as we have been told, that we will be much better off as a result of leaving and that there will be considerable savings, as the right hon. Lady promised a moment ago, will she promise that those savings will be used to replace the programmes that are currently funded by the EU, such as the crucial £50 million-a-year skills programme that operates in the Black country?

**Elizabeth Truss:** There will be savings once we leave the European Union, as I have made clear. We want to ensure that those savings are spent in the best interests of everybody in the UK to make our country as successful as it can be.

**Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Chief Secretary will be very aware that her constituents and mine voted overwhelmingly to leave. Does she agree that it feels on the ground as though most people now want to get on with Brexit, but also that they expect the UK to be fair, generous and magnanimous, so long as the financial settlement is contingent on a free trade deal?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As my hon. Friend points out, the people of Norfolk are fair minded. They want the referendum result to be respected and they want to honour our commitments to the European Union, but they want that to happen in a way that is fair for Britain and British taxpayers and that ensures that we get the best possible deal.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The figures are astronomical. Is it not the case that the British public are already paying the costs of this Government's approach to Brexit in the form of the £3 billion that the Chancellor announced in the Budget would be spent on Brexit contingencies and the more than £700 million that he has already shelled out? Should people not have been told about that before the referendum?

**Elizabeth Truss:** It is completely irresponsible of the Opposition to suggest that we should not prepare for all eventualities. It would be disgraceful for the Government not to do that. That would not be the proper action of a responsible Government.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): For the first time in my parliamentary career, I agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). He is absolutely

[Mr Peter Bone]

right. The 60%-odd of people in Wellingborough who voted to leave would want to know what we were doing with £60 billion. They would want it to be spent on the NHS, social care and defence. They would not want it to be given to the European Union. Does the Chief Secretary agree that such a move would betray the trust of the British people?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The amounts of money we have read about in the press are speculation. The negotiations are ongoing and we want to secure value for money for the British taxpayer. It is in our interest to secure a long-term economic partnership with the European Union, but we will not pay over money until everything is agreed.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Page 25 of the Government's brand new industrial strategy document states that the Government are seeking a transition—sorry, an implementation period—of “around two years”. Does the reported deal include provision to pay for an extended deal beyond two years?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The negotiations are taking place at the moment. We want to secure a reasonable transition deal, but we have to know what the future relationship will be like before we enter into the transition deal. The British public will not accept the can being kicked down the road. They want to know that we are leaving the European Union.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The greatest risk to the new partnership that both the UK and the EU want is that the EU makes such unreasonable demands that no British Government could accept them, on the wrong assumption that this House will never vote for no deal. Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that all Members who want a good deal, like the hon. Members for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), should make it absolutely clear to their constituents that they do not subscribe to the ludicrous idea that any deal is better than no deal?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I fear that Opposition Members have not made that logical leap yet, but I am sure that my hon. Friend's question will have helped them reconsider in their own minds.

**Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*  
[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Extraordinary behaviour! It is good of the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) to drop in on us.

**Mr Shuker:** Can the right hon. Lady name any moment in any aspect of the negotiations so far when the Government have gone head to head with the EU27 on an issue on which they have competing ideas about what to do and come out on top? Is this not yet another example of the Government crumbling and facing up to the reality of leaving the EU?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are making continuous progress in our negotiations with the EU. Of course, in any negotiation there has to be give and take from both sides. That is exactly what is happening. However, it would be wrong to expose the details of the negotiations at this stage.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): In any divorce, the assets are divided. Given that in today's money—in real terms—our net contribution to the EU over the lifetime of our membership amounts to £209 billion, will my right hon. Friend make sure that we get our fair share of the EU's assets when we leave?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I assure my hon. Friend that that consideration is part of our discussions.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Before making a big decision, it is generally sensible to inquire about the price. Most people will be staggered to learn that the average household in this country will be asked to stump up between £2,000 and £3,000 to pay for this. What plans do the Government have to tell people about the bill they are facing and to ask them whether they think it is a good use of their money?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman needs to look at both sides of the account, because we will not be paying ongoing vast sums into the EU as we are at the moment. He needs to look at the big picture.

## Rail Update

1.29 pm

### **The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about our plans for Britain's railways. Those railways were privatised in the mid-1990s against a backdrop of what many regarded as terminal decline. The radical Beeching cuts of the 1960s had been followed by further line closures under British Rail, and passenger numbers had been falling steadily since the second world war, yet privatisation sparked a remarkable turnaround in the railway's fortunes. More than a million and a half more trains are timetabled each year than was the case 20 years ago, and passenger demand has more than doubled. Other countries are now adopting Great Britain's rail model in their own markets.

To support that growth and reverse decades of underinvestment in the infrastructure, we have embarked on the biggest rail modernisation programme since the Victorian age. In addition to Government funding, billions of pounds of investment from the private sector is helping to renew and expand train fleets, upgrade stations and transform services across the country, and franchises are making an increasing contribution to the public purse. The rail renaissance we are seeing in Great Britain today is the direct result of a successful partnership between public and private sectors.

That partnership has delivered real benefits for passengers for more than 20 years, but that success has created its own challenges. As the number of services has increased, our network has become more and more congested, making the delivery of the punctual, reliable services that passengers expect more challenging. On much of the network, our railway is operating on the edge of what it can cope with. It carries more passengers today than it did in its heyday in the 1920s, on a network that is a fraction of the size. When things go wrong, the impact can be widespread and quick, causing significant frustration for the travelling public.

That is why last year I announced plans to start bringing together the operation of track and train on our railways. I said at the time that it should be a process of evolution and not revolution, and that the exact approach might differ from area to area, but the outcome must be the same: a railway that is predominantly run by a joint local team of people with an absolute commitment to the smooth running of the timetable whether they are planning essential repairs, responding to incidents on the line or communicating with passengers.

Today I am publishing more details about our plans, and an update on what we are doing and the steps we are taking to realise our ambitions. That publication, "Connecting people: a strategic vision for rail", explains how we will create a new generation of regional rail operations with a relentless focus on the passengers, economies and communities they serve. It represents the biggest change to the delivery of rail services since privatisation.

Although we have already achieved significant structural improvements—with joined-up working between operators and Network Rail, and Network Rail's own transformation into a series of regional route businesses—the document explains our plans to go much further. Where doing so will deliver real benefits for passengers, many future rail

franchises will be run by a joint team, made up of staff from Network Rail and the train company, and headed by a new alliance director. That will make the railway more reliable for passengers by devolving powers to local routes and teams, and ensuring that one team is responsible for running the railways and the related infrastructure.

Today I am issuing the invitation to tender for the next south-eastern franchise. That will, among other things, deliver longer trains, providing space for at least 40,000 additional passengers in the morning rush hour. A simpler, high-frequency "turn up and go" timetable on suburban routes will boost capacity and provide a better service to passengers. As part of the unification of track and train, the day-to-day operations on the south-eastern network will be run by a joint team led by a new alliance director who heads both the train and track operations. On the east midland main line we will also introduce a joint team approach, bringing more benefits to passengers.

Hon. Members will know that the east coast main line has had its challenges in recent times, and I intend to take a different approach on that route. From 2020, the east coast partnership will run the intercity trains and track operations on this route. That partnership between the public and private sector will operate under one management and a single brand, overseen by a single leader. It will take a leading role in planning the future route infrastructure and meeting the challenges that it faces. Bringing the perspective of train operators to decisions on rail infrastructure will help to ensure that passenger needs are better represented in the process. While we run a competition to appoint the east coast partnership members, we are in discussions with the existing east coast franchise operator to ensure that the needs of passengers and taxpayers are met in the short term, and laying the foundations for the reforms I have just outlined.

I want the passenger to be central to train operators' strategies. On some parts of the network, that will mean that we introduce smaller train companies. I am today launching a consultation on the great western franchise, to seek views on how it can best meet the needs of passengers and communities in the 2020s and beyond. We want to establish whether it should be retained in its current form or divided into smaller parts, with more of a local focus, to deliver best for customers. We will also begin the process of splitting up the Thameslink, southern and great northern franchise in 2021. The two franchises were put together with the intention of helping the implementation of the £6 billion Thameslink upgrade investment programme, which is now near completion.

Despite the improvements in the railway since privatisation, we are still some way from achieving the modern, high-performance, low-cost and customer-focused industry we all want to see. That is why we must continue to reform and invest in the railway, and maximise the contribution that both public and private sectors make to improving services. We will continue to deliver the biggest investment programme in our railways since the steam age, something the Labour party never did when it was in government.

Getting to grips with industry structure will go hand in hand with investment in infrastructure. We need new capacity to cope with growing demand, and new links to support economic growth and housing development.

[Chris Grayling]

The great north rail project is transforming journeys across the north, providing faster, more comfortable journeys, new direct services and room for tens of thousands more passengers. Every single train in the north of England will be replaced with as-new or brand new stock—that change was never made when the Labour party was in power.

I intend to invest around £3 billion in upgrading the trans-Pennine route to deliver faster journey times and improved capacity between the great cities of Leeds, York and Manchester. In the south, flagship projects such as Crossrail and Thameslink are coming on stream and providing the capacity to underpin economic growth. Our investment in HS2 will bring north and south closer together, and bring benefits to people across the country. It is a new railway for a new era for rail. It is a bold and ambitious project, but if it were not for ambition and faith in the power of rail to transform the country, we would have no railways at all.

Our vision rejects the mentality of decline that characterised the railway in the second half of the 20th century. To complement record levels of private investment, we recently announced Government funding of up to £34.7 billion for the railway in the years 2019 to 2024, as part of an overall expected spend of £47.9 billion. That will support an overhaul of the network's ageing assets and other vital work and improvements. Passengers value reliability more than anything, and this commitment will help to deliver it.

We also want to create new connections. We are establishing the East West Rail company to restore the rail link between Oxford and Cambridge that was lost to passengers in 1967 and to provide a major boost to the region. I expect construction work to begin next summer. We will look at other opportunities to restore capacity lost under Beeching and British Rail cuts of the 1960s and 1970s, where such projects would unlock development and growth, offer value for money and unlock the potential for housing.

Large projects and industry reform take time, but passengers want faster improvements in their day-to-day experience travelling on the railway. We do too, and we are doing something about it. We are pushing to have smart ticketing available across almost all the network by the end of 2018. We are improving arrangements for compensation and dispute resolution when things go wrong, including by supporting the establishment of a new passenger ombudsman. We are working with industry to extend the benefits of discounted rail travel, to ensure that all who are aged 16 to 30 can access appropriate concessions. We are investing in new digital technologies and better mobile connectivity. We are committed to improving the accessibility of the network and delivering a modern customer experience that is open to all.

I know that the Labour party does not believe this, but privatisation brought a revolution to our railways—that is why there are twice as many passengers as there were 20 years ago. But now is the time for evolution to build on that success: joining up track and train, expanding the network, modernising the customer experience and opening up the railway to innovation. We have a vision of a revitalised railway that is used to its full potential, delivered by a partnership between the public and private sectors, supporting people, communities and the economy.

We are taking real action to make that vision a reality. I am making copies of the strategic vision available in the Libraries of both Houses, and the great western and south-eastern documents are now on the website of the Department for Transport. I commend this statement to the House.

1.39 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice of his statement, the contents of which have already been well trailed in the media.

The Secretary of State and I can be in agreement on rail's need for investment and new capacity, and I am delighted that he has picked up Labour's manifesto commitment to reopen branch lines. The problem is that the current system and the structure of the railways do not lend themselves well to the receipt of new investment or the delivery of new capacity. The majority of the recent problems on the railway can be traced back to the planning for control period 5, when the Office of Rail and Road said that Network Rail had to make efficiency savings of 18%. The ORR got this wrong, and the railway has suffered the consequences.

We are where we are on rail, and I am afraid that the Secretary of State has, frankly, now run out of ideas for what to do with the railways, but Labour has a solution, which I will refer to in a moment. The Secretary of State proposes an alliance on the east coast line between track and train. This was done only a few years ago between Stagecoach and Network Rail on the south-west franchise, but Stagecoach pulled out because it was too expensive. Trains on the east coast may be labelled Virgin trains, but they are actually run by Stagecoach. What makes the Secretary of State think that this alliance with Stagecoach will be any different?

The Secretary of State says he will break up the GTR's southern and great western franchises. GTR was always going to be broken up at the end of the contract in 2021, so this is not new. His calamitous oversight of the contract only adds to the urgent need to put the whole thing out of its misery for the sake of the passengers.

The Secretary of State says he will reopen lines. He announced the Oxford-Cambridge line a year ago. His new, privately funded line will operate with polluting diesel trains. What about the air quality? Labour supports reopening lines, but, without financial backing, the Secretary of State's proposals mean nothing in reality. It is all well and good to reverse the Beeching cuts, but what about reversing the Grayling cuts to the great western, the midland mainline and northern railways? The Department's website hails the reopening of the line

“from Blyth to Ashington in County Durham.”

If it is all right with him, I would prefer Blyth and Ashington to stay in Northumberland.

The Secretary of State's proposals offer nothing for commuters on overcrowded trains who are facing a fare hike of 3.4% in January on top of the 27% rises since 2010. The truth is that the rail system is broken. No amount of rearranging the furniture will change this central fact. I regret that the Secretary of State cannot recognise or admit this.

Today's announcement is a total smokescreen. We can put all this to one side; the real issue is that the east coast franchise has failed again and the taxpayer will

have to bail it out. Markets do not lie, and the Stagecoach share price has risen by 12% this morning following the news that the Secretary of State has let it off the hook for hundreds of millions of pounds by ending the current franchise early. He has moved the goalposts to suit Stagecoach. He is tough on everyone except the private sector. Labour took the franchise into public ownership in 2009, and it should have stayed there. Conservative dogma put it back out to the market in 2015, and it has now failed again.

The Government's proposals are more window dressing that will solve none of rail's urgent problems. Only Labour has the vision and the courage to deliver the railway the public deserves. The public want public ownership of the railways, and the next Labour Government will deliver it.

**Chris Grayling:** Fortunately, this country will be waiting a long time for that to happen. What Labour Members really want is to take us back to the days of British Rail, but they have not explained to us how they would pay for all the new trains currently funded by the private sector, or how they would pay for longer trains and better services all around the country. What they do not tell us is that, with a publicly run railway, trains would have to compete for capital costs with hospitals and schools and we would just not get the investment we are currently getting in our railways. Going back to British Rail is simply no solution for the improvements this country desperately needs.

The hon. Gentleman asked a series of specific questions. What is different is what is happening within Network Rail. The devolution within Network Rail—more of a local focus, local decision making, local budgets—is absolutely crucial in making local partnerships possible. We are driving through that change right now, off the back of Nicola Shaw's report on Network Rail, and it is the right thing to do for the future.

The hon. Gentleman talked about GTR, but I remind the House that the independent Gibb report showed that the GTR problems were substantially down to the actions of the hon. Gentleman's friends in the unions. Such conduct was unacceptable, and the Labour party's continuing support for the disruption that unions are causing to passengers on the railways is utterly unacceptable.

The hon. Gentleman asked a question about the Oxford-Cambridge railway line. I did actually give an update on that. Last year, I said we were going to do it. This year, I am saying that we are now ready to start work on that route in the next few months. This Conservative Government are delivering real improvements and real investment on the railways.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the finance for reopening lines. He may have missed these announcements in the Budget, but I can assure him that there will be £2 billion more for investment in transport in our cities, and there will be £47 billion for investment in the railways over the next five years. We will, indeed, be funding investment in the expansion of the railways, because that is what is needed.

The hon. Gentleman asked a question about electrification. I say again that in a world where we have more flexible technology, I regard it as more of a priority to provide more services and more routes for passengers than to save one minute on the journey time

to Sheffield and no minutes on the journey time to Swansea. I am doing what we need to do, which is to deliver better journeys, better journey times and new trains for passengers, which is what they want above all. They are not worried about how the trains are powered, but about whether they will have a nice new train that gets them to the right place, and that is what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman raised a point about the Blyth-Ashington line. It is one of the projects I am looking at seriously. I think it has real potential to expand the investment we are already making in the Metro in Newcastle upon Tyne, and it is another example of this Government's commitment to the north-east.

The hon. Gentleman asked what we are doing for commuters. All around the country, we and the private sector, together in partnership, are delivering new trains and longer trains to create more space for people who travel on our crowded railway lines each day.

On the hon. Gentleman's last point, let us be absolutely clear for the House that as we bring the east coast franchise to a close and move to the new arrangements, no one will get any bail-out at all. It is absolutely clear that Stagecoach will meet in full the commitments it made to the Government as part of this contract, and that is what will happen.

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I warmly welcome the commitment in the strategy document to the east-west railway line through my constituency and the announcement that its construction will start very soon. Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about when he expects the western section of the line to be up and running, and how this will feed into the National Infrastructure Commission's recommendations on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is right that this is an important project. We have been pushing ahead hard with the new special purpose vehicle, which will be set up in the coming weeks. Construction is due to begin next summer, and my goal is to have the first trains running on that route by the end of 2021.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. Unfortunately, I am having to thank him for early sight of what is a disappointing damp squib. Given the media coverage last night about the possible reversal of the Beeching cuts, I hoped there would be some firm commitments in the statement, but there is nothing other than a throwaway line.

The Beeching cuts were typical of the Tory policy of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing, and this attitude continues in the Secretary of State's ideological adherence to privatisation. While he worships the private sector, he needs to remember that there are already four foreign state-owned rail companies operating existing UK franchises. If it is good enough for foreign state-owned companies, it should be good enough for UK state-owned companies to run the franchises. I hope that he supports the Scottish Government's move to make a public sector bid in Scotland.

The Secretary of State trumpets the turnaround in rail since privatisation, but he does not say that it has been driven by a 90% increase in public sector investment

[Alan Brown]

and a real-terms fare increase of a quarter. That is where the real investment and the turnaround have come from. The Secretary of State's real masterplan is to create alliances and effectively to sub-divide Network Rail, so I have the following questions. What is the overall governance structure to prevent inter-alliance conflict? Given that he is such a fan of devolution, will he devolve Network Rail to Scotland? Who will fund the new railcard for 26 to 30-year-olds? Will the smart ticket system automatically provide consumers with the cheapest fares? If he is considering reopening lines, will he stop the fire sale of Network Rail assets? He will be well aware that the Scottish Government built the biggest new line in the UK for more than 100 years, on the borders. Will he consider reconnecting Carlisle to the borders by rail? Finally, what are the statement's funding implications for Scotland, and will he review the existing funding gap of £600 million in control period 6?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman has asked a mix of questions; let me take them in turn. On devolution, it remains this Government's position that we will follow the recommendation, which was part of the broader devolution package, that the Scottish Government should be responsible for franchising but not for the infrastructure. The Scottish National party needs to demonstrate that it can do a decent job in government with the powers it has, rather than ask for more powers.

We are working through the railcard with the industry. The extra revenues may well mean that it will be a self-financing venture, but the Treasury has underwritten it in the Budget process. On the cheapest fare options, I want a system of smart ticketing on our railways so that, for future shorter journeys, we end up with the kind of pay-as-you-go technology that exists in London and other cities, so that people can tap in and tap out as they travel. For longer journeys, ticketing is likely to be based on mobile phones and barcodes. We are working to achieve those objectives as soon as possible.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the sale of assets. There are times when assets are genuinely not needed. They can be sold and the money put back into the railway line—that is the right thing to do—but of course there are assets that we need to protect for the future. Frankly, I wish that some assets had not been disposed of or built over, because that makes it more difficult to reopen some of the routes that I would like to be reopened. We will protect the assets we need.

I applaud the Scottish Government for what they have done with Borders Railway, which is a good project and has made a positive difference to that part of Scotland. I am happy to talk to my Scottish counterparts about how we can do more in the future.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the funding settlement. As I have said before in this House, the funding settlement for Scotland for rail is based on the Barnett formula, which the SNP does not usually argue against. I do not think it can have its cake and eat it.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I welcome the news that the GTR franchise is to be broken up. It is too big to be managed and has a management incapable of managing it, but given that it has frequently been unable to live up to its performance

indicators, why do we have to wait until 2021 to get a competent operator in charge of a manageable franchise area?

**Chris Grayling:** The real thing we have to achieve is to get through the rest of the Thameslink investment programme. In the coming months, we will also do some significant works on the Brighton main line, spending the £300 million I committed last year to doing the big parts of the project around Balcombe, for example. I would not wish us to destabilise things during that period, but once that is done we will need to get on with making the change.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Alliances and joint teams can improve dialogue between Network Rail and operators, but that is not a fundamentally different proposition from what has happened before and what is happening now on certain segments of the railway. The underlying factors that contribute to the misalignment between operators and Network Rail—namely, separate performance regimes and financial incentives—simply do not appear to have been addressed. Will the Secretary of State set out the specific steps he intends to take to tackle those fundamental structural shortcomings, so that we finally have a railway that drives co-ordinated performance, cost-reductions and improved reliability?

**Chris Grayling:** We are already, in the alliance areas and, indeed, elsewhere, moving to aligned performance incentives and aligned key performance indicators. That work is already happening on routes such as great western, where a route board and key performance indicators are being increasingly aligned, so that Network Rail has an incentive to look after passengers in a way that has not always been the case in the past. When it comes to a joint venture on the east coast main line, the KPIs will be the same, because there will be one team doing it. That is the benefit of having somebody in charge, a joint brand, joint planning of budgets and joint KPIs in the same team. That is what is different from the past.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, this Government's continued investment in our railways and the success that is possible only because of the partnership with the private sector. He will be aware that concerns have been raised about the break-up of the great western franchise. May I seek his reassurance that any proposals will not leave Devon and Cornwall isolated and that they will be introduced only if they are in the best interests of improving services to and from the south-west and provide value for money for the passenger?

**Chris Grayling:** First, let me be clear: I do not envisage a Devon and Cornwall-only franchise. That is not part of the plan. I am asking a legitimate question: should we go back to having, in effect, something like Wessex Trains and a franchise with its headquarters in the south-west, that provides regional services in the south-west and that could theoretically even do some of the long-distance services up to Paddington from Penzance? There are pros and cons to that. This is a consultation

to ask the south-west what it thinks. It is no more and no less than that, and I want to get the right answer for the south-west.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I welcome today's big message that our railways work better when track and train are operated together and the fact that the Secretary of State is now trying to correct the big mistake in the original rail privatisation, when his party separated track and train ownership. May I ask him, on behalf of my constituents in Surbiton, to consider the urgent safety case for a new staircase at platforms 3 and 4 at Surbiton train station, given how dangerously overcrowded they can become during the evening peak?

**Chris Grayling:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support for bringing back together the operation of track and train. If he wants to catch me offline, I would be happy to look at the issue he raises.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. He mentioned smaller railway operators. Will he clarify whether that includes open-access operators, and if so, does he foresee that leading to an extension of services such as those in my own area of northern Lincolnshire?

**Chris Grayling:** I am a strong supporter of open access, which plays an important part in the railways. The east coast main line has been a significant user of open access, or is a route on which there has been open-access operators. As we move into the era of HS2 and as we move express trains off some of the other routes, I expect there to be more, rather than less, scope for open access in the future. It is certainly not my intention for the open access available to my hon. Friend's part of the country to be changed in coming years.

**Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): The east coast main line was run for many years by a not-for-profit company and it made a profit for the Treasury, but that is not what I want to ask about. I have been campaigning for 30 years to reopen the Blyth and Ashington line. Now that that is on the cards, will the Secretary of State tell me when it will happen, so that I can tell my constituents? I do not want to have to wait another 30 years, because I will be dead.

**Chris Grayling:** I will do my very best to make sure that the hon. Gentleman will not have to wait that long. There is real short-term potential to reopen that route. I am not going to put a date on it today, but it makes a lot of sense to integrate it with the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Metro. We will push the project forward with feasibility and development plans.

**Mr Campbell:** When?

**Chris Grayling:** We are going to press ahead with it in the immediate future and look at what will not happen. I am not going to give the hon. Gentleman an exact date—I never do that.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Eastleigh is a historic railway town, and transport issues really matter in my thriving but getting-more-busy-and-congested constituency,

which hosts Southampton airport. East-west connectivity between Portsmouth and Southampton on a railway line takes an hour. Will the Secretary of State commit to working across Departments to make sure that there is a joined-up approach for constituencies that not only provide housing, but are blighted by air pollution, congestion and a historic lack of investment in railway lines?

**Chris Grayling:** I give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is really important that, as we seek to develop more housing, we make sure that infrastructure is in place to cope with it, whether road, rail or cycle routes, or different forms of public transport in different parts of the country. I assure her that I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who is in charge of the housing infrastructure fund, will look supportively at those parts of the country that are being asked to take on housing development and see how we can best provide infrastructure for them.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): I echo the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) about the idea of breaking up the great western franchise because of the loss of ability to cross-subsidise from the more profit-making parts of the region to the more expensive parts in the far south-west. Exactly how much extra taxpayers' money is he handing over to Stagecoach as a result of the Government's botched and ideologically driven reprivatisation of what was a perfectly good and profitable publicly owned company?

**Chris Grayling:** The answer is that at this stage we have not yet reached final arrangements. My intention is not to hand over money, but to get the railway line in a preparation stage for the establishment of the east coast partnership. With regard to the great western franchise, this is genuinely a consultation. There are two options: we could continue with the great western franchise as it is, or we could create a second franchise that is focused on the south-west. I have heard both arguments. I am committed to having more accountability and better transport in and around the south-west, which is why we are finally dualling the A303, for example. This is a genuinely open consultation and I want to hear views about it.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I totally support greater unification of train and track. For my constituents, it is absolutely maddening that when we have problems on the railway—unfortunately, we frequently do on the great eastern main line—Network Rail and the train operator can argue about who is to blame, because our constituents want a single body to point a finger at. Will he confirm that there will be far simpler accountability under these structures, and that when our Greater Anglia franchise expires, we will have the opportunity to look at this sort of regional arrangement?

**Chris Grayling:** I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I think that this approach should spread across the whole rail network, with clearer accountability, clearer integration, clearer joint working when something

[Chris Grayling]

goes wrong and better joint planning for maintenance works and affected services. That is a really important part of ensuring that the railways work for the future.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Why did the Secretary of State not use this opportunity to say that there would be electrification of the whole of the midland main line, instead of it stopping somewhere in Northampton to suit commuters travelling into London? The other business is that people in my constituency have been asking him for a meeting to try to put to him an alternative to the HS2 spur that will wreck 30 houses in a tiny village in my area. When will he answer their letter? He can tell me now.

**Chris Grayling:** On the hon. Gentleman's latter point, my hon. Friend the Rail Minister has already extended an invitation to that meeting, so we will happily talk to the hon. Gentleman's office this afternoon and fix a date. With regard to the midland main line, we are in the early stages of what is the biggest investment programme in the line since the 1870s. It will mean faster journeys and brand new trains, years earlier than would otherwise have been the case. We can deliver those new trains in 2021-22. We could wait several years more for those new trains. We could spend £1 billion more, but all we would be doing is saving a minute on the journey time to Sheffield. I could be wrong, but I do not think that would be a terribly good use of taxpayers' money.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. What steps are being taken to improve stations, and particularly to improve disabled access at stations such as Rugeley Trent Valley?

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely share my hon. Friend's concern. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Rail Minister has made improving accessibility on the rail network a particular part of his work. We will continue accessibility funding in control period 6, and the opportunity will be there for individual stations and areas to come forward with proposals on how we can do better in what is an extremely important challenge that the rail industry faces.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a year and a half since the then Under-Secretary of State responded to our calls to look at extending the borders rail link—incidentally, it was delivered on time and under budget by the Scottish Government—to Carlisle, and she said that she was interested in looking into that. Will the Secretary of State now take those discussions forward with the Scottish Government?

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to take forward those discussions with the Scottish Government. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Rail Minister is meeting the borders rail campaign shortly. We absolutely understand the benefits that the project, which the Scottish Government have already delivered, has brought to the borders.

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that on the Isle of Wight there might be interest in extending the island line to the beautiful

seaside town of Ventnor and the county town of Newport—the latter has been made possible in part due to the foresight of the Isle of Wight steam railway in securing track in decades past? Will money be available for feasibility studies to assess the costs and benefits of opening up, for economic regeneration purposes, former branch lines that were closed in the '60s?

**Chris Grayling:** In the new year we will publish a new process for evaluating new projects and moving them into development. I will happily talk with my hon. Friend about how that process will work and how he can have his project on the Isle of Wight considered.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): I have written to the Secretary of State about Kirkstall Forge railway station in my constituency. It opened just over a year ago, but only one train stops there an hour. If we are going to open new railway stations, we must have trains stopping at them. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet with Arriva Rail North and myself to talk about the frequency of services at Kirkstall Forge, so that we can get maximum benefit out of this housing and business development?

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to have that conversation. When a new station opens, it is not unusual for it to start with an hourly service while the passenger ridership builds. Of course, as demand grows, services tend to grow. I am just delighted that we are able to invest in better station facilities in the hon. Lady's constituency, which I am sure she will agree were long overdue.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the overall thrust of this plan. As the Secretary of State will know, it is probably no coincidence that the current GWR franchise covers roughly the same area that the railway company did back in the 1930s, so it is interesting to note the proposal to split. Can he reassure me that in any consideration of this the top priority will be services to passengers, particularly maintaining direct links between London Paddington and Paignton?

**Chris Grayling:** I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that we want to see those services protected. Again, this is a genuine consultation. I do not have a pre-set view; I am relaxed and I want to listen to those people who represent the south-west and ask, "What works best for the constituents you represent?" We will listen and respond accordingly. There is certainly no prejudged view in the Department about what the right way forward is; we are simply asking the question.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Secretary of State's U-turn on his promise to electrify the line from Cardiff to Swansea included all the safety improvements that were part of that work, including the plan to close the level crossing in Pencoed in my constituency. Can he set out, as part of his grand vision for the railways, how he will now invest in closing dangerous level crossings? While he is at it, will he explain how he will keep the promise on highway improvements in the same town, which were linked to rail electrification?

**Chris Grayling:** Safety remains fundamentally important for Network Rail. We are fortunate enough to have the safest rail network in Europe. Network Rail has a rolling programme to replace dangerous level crossings,

which will continue in all circumstances. I think that the Welsh Labour Government are rapidly reaching the same conclusion that we are reaching, because the versatility of bi-mode trains means that we do not always have to erect overhead cables. The hon. Gentleman talks about us making the wrong decisions, but I caution him to wait and see what the Welsh Government decide to do, because he might find that the Labour party agrees with us on the best way forward.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I welcome the announcement that the southern and Thameslink franchise will be broken up—it cannot come soon enough for my constituents. Can I ask specifically about the line reopening, because we have the Lewes to Uckfield line in my constituency, with the BML2 scheme, which could be opened very easily, improving connectively and putting towns such as Seaford and Newhaven on a main line for the first time? We have private investors willing to put up over £15 million to fund that. Will the Secretary of State use that scheme as one of the first to illustrate what can really be done?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend knows that I have met the investors who are interested in pursuing that project, and I have said that I am very open to doing so. I am waiting with interest for them to come back with the first stage of their work. I would be delighted to see the route reopened, and I hope that the consortium pursuing the project will prove successful.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): There was little mention of Wales in the Secretary of State's letter to hon. Members on the great western consultation, yet key services run through my constituency. Just this morning, commuters to Bristol and beyond have yet again had to highlight the chronic lack of capacity as demand grows. Can he tell my constituents when they will see real action and improvement?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, much of the responsibility for local services in the hon. Lady's constituency lies with the Welsh Government, and I am looking forward to seeing the outcome of their work in delivering new trains and better services as part of the new franchise. As for what we are doing in her constituency, there is the electrification programme into Paddington and the investment in the intercity express trains, which are providing faster and better journeys, but I am expecting and hoping for a significant increase in services from Cardiff eastwards as part of the Wales and the borders franchise, which is one reason why we support the plan for Cardiff Parkway station. I am hoping for a significant enhancement, as part of that franchise, to the connections from Cardiff to Newport and Bristol.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The east Suffolk line, which runs from Lowestoft to Ipswich, dodged the Beeching bullet and is now going from strength to strength, with a regular hourly service. Will he give an assurance that his improvements will provide the framework for further improvements, including a more frequent and faster service?

**Chris Grayling:** One of the things I am pleased we are doing in partnership with the private sector is the complete transformation of the train fleet across East Anglia. Every

single train will be replaced with brand-new trains that have more capacity for passengers. As demand grows, we will have to look again at routes such as my hon. Friend's to see whether there is a need for more services. In the immediate future, however, I hope that his constituents will be delighted to see the brand-new trains arriving to deliver a better journey for them.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): I am struck by the contrast between, on the one hand, the strength and wisdom of the best Select Committee report of my time in Parliament, the unanimous 1993 report by a Tory-dominated Committee chaired by the Secretary of State's late colleague, Robert Adley, which forecast accurately all the problems that privatisation would bring, and, on the other hand, today's statement, which seems nothing more than a piece of vacuous window dressing designed to distract us from the Government's collapsing policies on Brexit.

**Chris Grayling:** There is nothing like trying to shoehorn every issue into one question, is there? The simple reality is that back in the 1990s our railways were in a state of decline—routes and stations were being closed, and there was even a plan to turn Marylebone station into a coach station. That was the reality of the days of British Rail. In the past 20 years, we have seen new trains, new routes and double the number of passengers. The problems today are the problems of success, not failure. That is why the approach in today's statement is the right one. It is not designed to tear everything up and start again; it is designed to evolve the railways so that they are better placed to deal with the challenges that result from success.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The last Labour Government halved the mainline northbound service from Kettering from a half-hourly service to an hourly service, but since then the significance of Kettering on the railway network has increased: there are now more passengers; it is effectively the hub between the commuter service to Corby and the main line northwards; and it is now to be the interface between the electrified part of the line and the diesel-operated part of the line. Will my right hon. Friend agree that Kettering would therefore be the ideal base for the new train and track operating team?

**Chris Grayling:** Kettering is a fine town and a well represented constituency, and I can absolutely understand the case that my hon. Friend and Kettering would make for its hosting the operating team. He is absolutely right that it is at the heart of the midland main line. It might have some competition from Derby and others, but he makes a strong case.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Chancellor of the Exchequer mentioned in the Budget last week the north Wales growth deal, which includes a proposal for a metro linking north Wales and the north-west of England much more effectively. Has the Secretary of State received a cheque from the Chancellor?

**Chris Grayling:** Actually, it was my suggestion that we look at the project. I have listened to the right hon. Gentleman and understood the argument, and the Chancellor has provided development funding so that we can take that work forward.

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): Building alliances and closer working between Network Rail and train operating companies into franchises is a welcome move, but I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend could advise us on how Network Rail will ultimately be held accountable for meeting the terms of future franchises or contracts, just as the train operating companies currently are. Also, will that mean that infrastructure improvements will now be considered as part of the franchising process?

**Chris Grayling:** On the latter point, they can be now—there is nothing to prevent train companies from coming forward with small-scale infrastructure proposals. I would be happy to see the private sector come forward with plans, for example, to introduce digital signalling on routes, but we will not move the infrastructure itself out of public ownership. The accountability comes from the performance measures we put in place for Network Rail and the people who lead it, but I think that devolution to individual routes will mean better services, a more local focus and more out-of-the-box thinking, which Network Rail needs to do if it is to deliver best value for everyone involved.

**Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): My constituents will be listening with avid interest, because prior to the general election, the Transport Secretary visited my constituency and said that the reinstatement of the Burscough curves between Burscough, Preston and Ormskirk would be a “quick win” to help improve rail services in the north. When will we get this “quick win”? When will funding for that project, for electrification in the area and for the Skelmersdale railway station be forthcoming? My constituents look forward to him keeping his promise.

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, the people of West Lancashire will be getting the benefit of the investment programme in the line from Manchester to Blackpool. It is a huge investment in improving the services on that route. That, right now, is our priority. After that, I hope we will move forward with other projects that can make a difference to passengers in Lancashire and elsewhere in the north-west.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement and the focus on passengers in particular. He will know that 30% of passenger improvements on Abellio Greater Anglia were due to the new fleet, but that 60% were due to the track. The Oxford-Cambridge line does not end at Cambridge, but goes through to Felixstowe and carries most of the freight for this country, so may I urge him to make Horley junction and Ely junction key priorities in order to deliver better services for both passengers and the freight industry?

**Chris Grayling:** I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance and reiterate the commitment I have given to people in East Anglia that in control period 6 the work on Ely junction will free up both freight and passenger access through that important junction and open up all kinds of opportunities across East Anglia. That will be an early priority for us.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): My constituents are used to travelling on trains where there is a link between those who run the track and those who run the rolling stock, but that body is the publicly run Transport for London, and the Secretary of State refuses to allow it to have anything to do with the south-eastern franchise based on the fact that we have a Labour Mayor. My constituents deserve better than his petty political grievances. Will he allow TfL to demonstrate that it is capable of running the franchise more efficiently than the private sector has done hitherto?

**Chris Grayling:** I would make two points. First, Transport for London does not run the track and the trains. The trains are run as part of a franchise by Arriva. Secondly, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that what we have outlined today—more services and longer trains on the south-eastern line—is a lot better than what TfL offered in its business plan. My concern is to deliver a better service for his constituents rather than unnecessary political shuffling.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What talks has the Secretary of State had with the Northern Powerhouse Minister about the upgrading of the trans-Pennine route, and will he consider linking up the great cities of Liverpool and Newcastle, as well as Leeds, York and Manchester?

**Chris Grayling:** Absolutely. The key point about the trans-Pennine upgrade is that we have already electrified it from Manchester to Liverpool. That bit of the project has been done. The next bit is from Manchester to Leeds to York. I have said that that will be a £3 million programme. It is the next big rail investment project. I am expecting Network Rail’s detailed proposals shortly. It will be the next big project we go ahead with and will make a big difference to the north.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): I warmly welcome the announcement today of a consultation on the great western franchise and the improvements it will bring to passenger services in Devon and beyond, but may I seek my right hon. Friend’s reassurance that there will be a focus in that process on the one rail service that serves my constituency—that between Exeter and Barnstaple? It is not just a quaint tourist line used in August; it is a vital part of north Devon’s economic infrastructure.

**Chris Grayling:** It certainly is, and I do not want that service to be diminished in any way. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that one of the routes on which we intend to start passenger services again—and we are actively engaged in that work—is the line from Okehampton to Exeter. I think that has the potential to ease congestion at Exeter, and to provide a better commuter route.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State tell us why he is not electrifying the midland main line even though every single business organisation, Member of Parliament and local council is telling him that that is what he should do? Why is he ignoring the wishes of local people and local representatives, saying that he knows best, and simply offering them a “joint team approach”, whatever that is?

**Chris Grayling:** The answer to that is very simple. Over the next four years, we will deliver the biggest upgrades to the midland main line since the 1870s. We are straightening tracks to improve line speeds, and resignalling in places such as Derby. The programme will deliver faster journey times—it will take 15 to 20 minutes off the journey to Sheffield—and we will deliver brand-new trains on that route in the early 2020s. I could then go further and electrify the route all the way to Sheffield, but all that I would be doing is delaying the arrival of new trains and saving one minute on the journey time to Sheffield, at a cost of £1 billion. I think that we should deliver what passengers want—better journeys, faster journeys and new trains—more quickly, and that is what we are going to do.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On my own behalf and that of my neighbour and right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), I thank the Secretary of State—who has visited our area and seen the potential there—for the proposals on page 31 of the south-eastern rail franchise stakeholder briefing document, which will deliver faster trains from Hastings with fewer station stops, and, crucially, require any bidder for the franchise to pay attention to the potential for high-speed rail to be extended to Hastings, Rye and Bexhill. Does he agree that that will unlock regeneration in our constituencies?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We get caught up in the biggest projects, but sometimes the smaller ones—even a bit of track realignment in places—can make the biggest difference. I hope to do big things, such as the trans-Pennine upgrade, but also smaller things at, for instance, Ashford, where we are trying to improve the situation for passengers.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): As the Secretary of State will know, the Cumbria coastline and the Furness line are giving a dire performance at the moment. It is disappointing that Cumbria was not mentioned in the strategy. Will he ask the Rail Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), to meet us to discuss what can be done about the 50-year-old locomotives that are breaking down and annoying residents, the terrible state of the rolling stock, and the awful standard of reliability? There is an urgent need to fix all that, otherwise there will be significant damage to the economy.

**Chris Grayling:** I am delighted to be able to remind the hon. Gentleman that we are scrapping all those trains on that route and getting new ones. We are also introducing better services, including Sunday services. All that is being rolled out now. We have a partnership with the Labour leaderships in the councils of the north and Transport for the North, and we have been working side by side to shape the new franchise and the replacements for the rail fleets, for which the Government are paying. Those trains are on order, and the first new trains are now entering service in the northern networks and the trans-Pennine network. Every single train in the north of England on every single route is being replaced—either completely refurbished as new, or scrapped. The old Pacer trains on the Cumbrian coastline, which should have been scrapped years ago and were not under Labour, are being scrapped by us now.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I noted, both in the rail strategy—which I welcome—and in the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), a reference to improvement works at Ely North junction. Can the Secretary of State assure me that when those works—which will benefit the entire region and take freight off the road—are completed, my constituents in Queen Adelaide will not be disadvantaged?

**Chris Grayling:** Our aim is always to minimise the impact of improvement works as they are happening, and also their consequences. I assure my hon. Friend that we will work with her and her constituents to ensure that this is a beneficial investment for her part of the world, and that where it has any impacts, we will minimise them as far as is possible.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I noted what the Secretary of State said about compensation for passengers when things go wrong. He is aware, I know, of the appalling service that Northern Rail is currently providing in my constituency. Could a more flexible compensation system be introduced? Delay Repay does not capture the full experience that my constituents are having.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend the Rail Minister and I are working to create a passenger ombudsman, because we recognise that there are circumstances in which a conventional repayment system does not reflect the problems that someone has experienced, and that will happen shortly.

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement, and particularly for what he said about the south-eastern franchise. It is necessary because of the significant amount of house building that will take place in north Kent over the next 20 years, and because there will be extra capacity and more seats for my constituents, who have been complaining about the service for a long time. Are there any further plans to increase capacity on the wonderful High Speed 1 network? My constituents who want to use that service often complain about the lack of seats and the inadequate number of trains available.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The high-speed trains to St Pancras are pretty full at peak times. We have talked to the bidders about that, and I know that they are thinking about how best to tackle the capacity challenge. We will see what happens when the bids come through, but I know that the issue is on everyone's radar.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): In 2014, the last Tory Prime Minister described electrification of the great western main line across south Wales as "transformational for communities" and "huge". Given that the Government have now cancelled electrification from Cardiff to Swansea, why should my constituents, or anyone else, believe Tory promises on rail again?

**Chris Grayling:** The answer is that we are delivering much faster connections to south Wales. The huge investment in the great western main line, not just in electrification but in improving the track and the signalling,

[Chris Grayling]

will make a transformational difference to the south Wales economy. We are spending money to ensure that the new intercity express trains can go west of Swansea, and brand-new intercity express trains are already travelling from Swansea and delivering better conditions for passengers. If we erect overhead cables between Cardiff and Swansea now, it will cost several hundred million pounds and deliver no extra benefits to passengers—not even a minute off the journey time—which is why that does not make any sense.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I was disappointed that the Secretary of State did not attend the debate on transport in the north on 6 November. He has talked about his priorities for transforming services in this country. Which does he think will happen first, Crossrail for the north between Liverpool and Hull or Crossrail mark 2 for London, between Surrey and Hertfordshire?

**Chris Grayling:** Those two projects will happen in lockstep. They are both important, they are both going to happen, and we are going to steer them in parallel.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The journey from Paddington to Cardiff is regularly a version of hell. Trains are frequently cancelled, and then everyone has to pile on to the next train, often an hour later. My constituents tell me that it is often announced that a train will not set off for another 20 minutes because it is too overloaded to be safe. At the weekends, instead of putting on extra trains after international matches, the company puts on fewer trains, which means that hundreds of people are standing for four hours. That is simply unfair and wrong. When will the Secretary of State put it right?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to see the arrival of the new Hitachi intercity express trains, which will have more seats and more capacity. They will replace trains that are well out of date, and will provide a faster, better service for passengers.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for helping to secure extra money for north Wales in the Budget, but that was for the development of a business case for the Wrexham-Bidston line, which is merely a taster. Will he please help to deliver the main course of the north Wales growth deal, which will unlock growth in one of the most effective and forward-looking areas of the national economy?

**Chris Grayling:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is after not just the hors d'oeuvre but a second course. That second course will probably be the Crewe hub, on which we are working carefully at the moment, but I thought that he at least deserved an appetiser. I buy the argument that the present situation as trains head north from Wrexham is not right, and I am therefore delighted that the Chancellor agreed to fund the development work for that scheme.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I give the Transport Secretary credit for acknowledging the failure on at least two occasions of the private franchise running the

east coast main line. My recollection is that when it was operated by the UK state-owned Directly Operated Railways it generated more than £100 million in profit for the Treasury, which could be used for vital public services. What assessment has he made of the additional costs of the private-public sector partnership, and would it not be better to use the profits to extend the Tyne and Wear Metro into Easington rather than swelling the coffers of privately operated train companies, often German, Dutch and Spanish Government-owned?

**Chris Grayling:** There is a curious conundrum in this. We hear so much uncertainty from Labour about what they think about Brexit: they seem to want to stay in the single market and continue to operate in the traditional way, but they do not want to work with train companies from other countries. That is a bit illogical.

I am delighted that we as a Government are finally investing—in a way that the hon. Gentleman's party did not—in rail in the north-east. The investment in trains on the Metro and the plans to extend it are the right things to do to help his constituency and the economy of the north-east, and I am very proud to be able to deliver them. It is also worth saying that the private sector franchise on the east coast main line has been contributing more to the Treasury than the public sector one did.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I wrote to the Secretary of State on 23 October and eagerly await his response. My constituents are, frankly, fed up with chronically overcrowded and unreliable trains and substandard services. What action is being taken to monitor the performance delivered by the train operating companies?

**Chris Grayling:** The good thing from the hon. Lady's point of view is that, although she is right that her constituency has old, overcrowded trains that are not long enough, we are replacing them with new longer trains. That will make a transformational difference to the travelling experience of her constituents and others right across the north.

**Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I have read the Secretary of State's document published today and was perplexed that there is no reference to mutual operators. I can only assume that that is an oversight, given that they provide democratic control, work within the existing framework he has laid out in this document, and reinvest their profits for the value of all passengers. Given that, will he or his Rail Minister commit to a short meeting to talk about the barriers faced by mutual operators?

**Chris Grayling:** I can only say that I will be very happy to see an employee-owned bid come forward. There is no barrier to that happening at all. I will be very happy to see a partnership between employees and investors come forward, and if there are artificial barriers to that happening, I am happy to see whether we can remove them.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Every line that could be reopened, as outlined in the Secretary of State's strategic rail vision, appears to be in England. The Aberystwyth to Carmarthen line was closed under the Beeching cuts, and reopening it not only enjoys considerable support

in Ceredigion but could serve to significantly boost the economy of west Wales. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me and the campaign group to discuss ways of adding that line to his map of lines that could be reopened?

**Chris Grayling:** We have a clear responsibility for Welsh infrastructure, and I want it to improve in a way that provides extra services for passengers and better routes, hence the Wrexham to Bidston investment that I expect us to make. The Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, will be very happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman and the campaign group about that route; I am aware of it, and was, in fact, talking about it the other day to people in Wales. I am well aware that people want that project to be opened, but I should also make it clear that, as we invest in reopening routes, they have to either unlock economic opportunity or housing opportunity or break up a real point of congestion. We cannot simply recreate old routes that no longer have a commercial purpose.

**Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op):** The Secretary of State will be aware from my communications of the importance of rail connectivity in my constituency of Leigh, which is the fifth largest town in the country without a railway station. Following the publication of his report today, the industrial strategy and the social mobility reports, which all highlight the importance of connectivity for social and economic purposes, will he confirm that my constituency will be, or has been, considered for the reversal of the Beeching cuts?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Lady makes a good point, and of course I want significant towns to be well served by the railways. I know she is meeting my hon. Friend the Rail Minister a little later this afternoon, and we will listen very carefully to what she says.

**Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab):** My constituency is on the brink of daily gridlock due to welcome but significant developments in housing and travel-to-work routes that are not fit for purpose, so I welcome the reference to the Portishead line and the Henbury line in this strategy, but the solution is the Henbury loop line. Will the Secretary of State commit

in his conversations with the Conservative metro Mayor for the west of England to reiterating the advice given by his Department to my predecessor—that an independent business case study should be funded for delivery of the Henbury loop line?

**Chris Grayling:** I spoke to the metro Mayor this morning about this and the investments we need, and also about North Filton railway station. He clearly has a strong agenda to take forward investment in the suburban service around Bristol. I have also been to the port and looked at the point on the putative Henbury loop that would be the issue. We need to resolve that, and I absolutely understand the need to get those services working well.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** The prize for patience and perseverance goes to Luke Pollard.

**Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Fragmentation of the great western franchise risks locking in a poor deal for rail for the far south-west, so will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to match the commitment given by the shadow Secretary of State for Transport to fund the peninsula rail taskforce recommendations for faster journeys and a more resilient railway, and to ensure that we can unlock the investment we need for Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall?

**Chris Grayling:** I reiterate my point that this is a consultation, and I want views from all sides. We will make a change only if it is the right thing to do. We are not going to create a little fringe franchise just for Devon and Cornwall, cutting them off. If we make a change, it will be to have much more of a south-western franchise serving the region, providing good links locally.

The peninsula rail taskforce's top recommendation was that we need to deal with the issue of the cliffs at Dawlish. The work on developing the solution to that is happening now, and that is critical to making sure that the route is resilient. That is my No. 1 rail priority for the south-west, and I give an absolute guarantee to the House that, as long as I am Transport Secretary and beyond, my party is committed to delivering a solution to prevent the real risk that those cliffs represent.

## Yemen

*Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)*

2.37 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely Britain's engagement with Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Today we are witnessing an almighty catastrophe of Biblical proportions unfolding in Yemen, in which Britain is dangerously complicit. Britain is respected throughout the world for bringing hope and relief to those caught up in humanitarian misery, but today in Yemen, which I visited earlier this year, we are in danger of earning a reputation for precisely the reverse, for the UK is part of the coalition that is imposing a blockade by land, sea and air on 27 million Yemenis. In recent weeks, fuel prices have risen by up to 160%, and rice and basic foods by nearly 70%. Fuel for generators, which are essential for hospitals and water-pumping stations, will run out shortly.

Yesterday's announcement by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, while arguably slowing the trajectory, will not in any way curtail this escalating disaster. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said last week that, unless the blockade is lifted, famine throughout Yemen is a very real threat, including on the southern borders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, wilfully impeding humanitarian access may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.

It is increasingly clear that this blockade imposed on Yemen constitutes the collective and illegal punishment of an entire population. If you grant this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that the House will see clearly that current policy will result in a huge strategic failure both for Saudi Arabia and, by extension, for the UK. It

is important that the voice of this House is heard urgently, along with the Prime Minister's on her current visit to the Gulf.

Above all, it is a moral failure that confronts us. Famine is a phenomenon that we were close to eradicating from the human condition. The last 20 years has seen only two famines throughout the world. When I was responsible in 2011 for co-ordinating the UK's efforts to address one of those famines, in Somalia, I saw for myself emaciated children and starving mothers. Today in Yemen we are witnessing a totally preventable mass humanitarian catastrophe, the likes of which we have not seen in decades.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** The right hon. Gentleman asks leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter which should have urgent consideration, namely the current situation in Yemen. On behalf of Mr Speaker, I have listened carefully to the application from the right hon. Gentleman. Mr Speaker is satisfied that the matter raised is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. Has the right hon. Gentleman the leave of the House?

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The motion is clearly—*[Interruption.]* Order. I reassure Members that I do not have to count them. No one indicated dissent and the proposal is clearly supported as required by the Standing Order.

*Application agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The debate will be held tomorrow, Thursday 30 November, as the first item of public business. It will last for up to three hours and will arise on a motion that this House has considered the specific matter set out in the right hon. Gentleman's application, namely that this House has considered the current situation in Yemen.

## Food Insecurity

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

2.41 pm

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Government to monitor and report on food insecurity; to make provision for official statistics on food insecurity; and for connected purposes.

People are going hungry, and with each passing day of this terrible excuse for a Government, more and more are falling into poverty with little chance of escape. There are no second chances in Britain today. Food poverty is a clear consequence of this Government's ideological assault on the social safety net and the people who rely on it, and of their ongoing inaction on poverty pay.

Each time hunger is raised in this Chamber, I have heard Secretaries of State and Ministers denigrate statistics from charities, food banks and colleagues, claiming that the figures are not robust enough, or that the information is not reliable enough to inform Government policy. Denying the accuracy of the data or simply turning a blind eye allows Conservative Members to pretend that the problem does not exist.

Today, with this Bill, I am giving the Government an opportunity to rectify this data gap and to robustly measure the levels of hunger in the UK, because we all know that what gets measured gets done. The problem of food insecurity in the UK is increasing. While the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are taking steps to implement measurement, this Government doggedly persist in refusing calls from the Food Foundation, Sustain, Oxfam, myself and a host of others to routinely and robustly measure levels of food insecurity. United Nations estimates from 2014 suggest that as many as 8 million households in the UK are food insecure. That is 8 million households who cannot afford to eat, or who are worrying about where their next meal will come from. But that estimate is based on a small survey of around 1,000 people, which is not nearly good enough to properly inform policy.

In 2016, when the Food Standards Agency surveyed households about food insecurity as part of the "Food and You" survey, it found that 21% of households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were moderately to severely food insecure. That one-off measurement gives a snapshot of the problem, but does not allow for an analysis of long-term trends or the ability to track the impact of policy changes.

This month, the Office for National Statistics released data showing that due to the drop in the value of sterling as a result of Brexit uncertainties, food inflation had risen more than 4% over the past year. We need up-to-date information on the impact that that is having on UK families' ability to afford enough healthy food, because being food insecure has lasting health impacts. We already know that the UK is facing a double burden of food insecurity and obesity, which is no surprise given the types of meals that a food insecure family can afford. More worryingly, in the last financial year, a count of hospital admissions in England revealed that nearly 8,000 adults and more than 300 children were admitted as a result of malnutrition. Those figures

should shame any Government, but for a Government in one of the richest countries in the world, they are simply unforgivable.

The latest data provided by the Trussell Trust shows that just over 1 million three-day emergency food supplies were given to people in crisis over the past year, but this is just the tip of the iceberg, as the Trussell Trust collects data only from its own food banks. Independent research has found that there are at least 1,000 food banks in operation. There are also the "hidden hungry", who will not go to a food bank and rely on the kindness of their friends, family and neighbours, or, worse still, go hungry so as not to face the shame of having to ask for food.

The desperate state of this problem is something that I and my colleagues see every day in our constituencies. I recall a woman who called my constituency office in desperate need of help after having problems with her benefits. She had no money for gas or electricity, and no food to feed herself and her four children under the age of 10. She was alone and unable to afford to get to the nearest food bank. In the end, our local volunteers in Shields managed to get food to her. The fact that faith groups and charities have had to fill a gap left by the state reveals a massive dereliction of duty by the Government. As a result, food banks are now a permanent part of our welfare state.

According to United Nations data on food insecurity in the UK, as many as 17 times the number of people using Trussell Trust food banks are food insecure. Also, food bank use is an indication of last resort, when families are at imminent risk of going hungry. Recurring or moderate food insecurity is not captured by measuring food bank use. We also know that measuring the proportion of income spent on food is not an adequate measure of food insecurity. New evidence from Canada shows that food insecure households will continue to spend the same proportion of their income on food when their income falls, and that they then experience increasingly severe food insecurity. In addition, these measures do not inform us about food affordability, the socio-emotional issues faced by people who are food insecure, the use of survival strategies, or people's inability to meet needs. These issues can be captured only by measuring a household's experience of food insecurity.

Capturing and measuring the experience of food insecurity is easier than we all think. Many survey tools have been validated and are being used in countries around the world. The United States Department of Agriculture's food insecurity module includes questions that assess both household and child food insecurity. The method involves asking a series of questions about people's experiences of accessing a sufficient quality and quantity of food. The results rank a household's food insecurity on a scale from mild to severe. The Bill proposes that such questions should be inserted into representative UK-wide household surveys that the Government already conduct.

What I propose is very simple. Adding the food insecurity module to an existing survey, such as the living costs and foods survey, could be cost-neutral if some less important questions were removed. For example, the survey currently asks households about the food they grow at home. We need new questions for new times.

This straightforward Bill proposes introducing an existing measure into an existing survey, which could be done cost neutrally. As we negotiate new trading

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

arrangements with Europe and beyond, as global populations rise, as conflicts spread and as more extreme weather affects food supplies globally and domestically, food security will become an even more important issue. In order to meet the challenges of the future and the urgency now, the need to measure food insecurity here in the UK is more important than ever.

As I present this Bill, there will be a mother in my constituency wondering how she is going to feed herself and her toddler today. There will be schoolchildren struggling to focus because their stomachs are rumbling, parents who have yet again skipped breakfast to ensure that their children did not have to, families searching their cupboards for what is left, and elderly people who are unable to access fresh food. But that is not just happening in my constituency; the situation is the same in constituencies and homes right across the UK. As I have outlined, implementing the measurement is not an insurmountable or costly challenge, and the Government owe it to every man, woman and child who woke up hungry this morning and will go to bed hungry tonight, in one of the richest countries in the world, to do so. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Frank Field, Kate Green, Jim Shannon, Liam Byrne, Kerry McCarthy, Stephen Timms, Dan Jarvis, Alison Thewliss, Layla Moran, Mr Jim Cunningham and Grahame Morris present the Bill.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 February 2018, and to be printed (Bill 136).*

## Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

### State Pension Age: Women

2.51 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to improve transitional arrangements for women born on or after 6 April 1951 who have been adversely affected by the acceleration of the increase to the state pension age.

Madam Deputy Speaker, may I wish you and everybody else in the Chamber a happy St Andrew's day for tomorrow? With your forbearance, I will just remark that today is the 50th anniversary of the mighty Hibernian football club defeating Napoli—with Dino Zoff in goal—5-0 at Easter Road, ensuring that they went on to the next stage of European football.

I am delighted to open the debate and to move the SNP's Opposition day motion calling for mitigation for women born in the 1950s. We are here in support of the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign and its efforts to secure fairness for women affected by the acceleration in their retirement age. I am saddened that we are having yet another debate on this issue, but the fundamental fact is that the Government should have taken action to mitigate the increase in women's pensionable age. There must be action. The 3.8 million affected women have waited simply far too long for effective mitigation.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman will recall that we both called for action well over two years ago when he and I were our parties' respective pensions spokespeople. Does he share my deep frustration that we have still had absolutely nothing?

**Ian Blackford**: I welcome that intervention, and I certainly look back fondly on the period when he and I were holding the Government to account. When the evidence is before us that the women did not get appropriate notice and that the acceleration is happening so quickly, it is an absolute outrage that we have had nothing from this Government.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): This is an important debate on an important issue—I also attended the debate in Westminster Hall last week—but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is wrong to say that the Government have taken no action? In 2011, they ensured that no one waited for an extended period beyond 18 months.

**Ian Blackford**: I have heard about spinning, but let me deal with the facts. The hon. and learned Lady refers to the fact that the Government brought in the Pensions Act 2011, but that increased the acceleration. To say that the Government have mitigated the situation is a distortion of reality, and Government Members should stop spinning and tell the 3.8 million affected women the truth: the pensionable age is increasing by three months per calendar month. That is the reality.

The Government should be utterly ashamed of trying to argue that they have mitigated things, which demonstrates that some Conservative Members simply do not get what is going on.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The tragedy is that it falls to us to speak for the individuals who have suffered. I have a constituent in Dolgellau who was born 24 hours too late and now has to work for an extra two years and three months. The change has led to individual tragedies.

**Ian Blackford**: I am grateful for that intervention; I cannot really add much to what the hon. Lady says, because she demonstrates the ridiculous nature of the situation and why the Government must listen.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con) *rose—*

**Ian Blackford**: I will take one more intervention, but then I must make some progress.

**Tim Loughton**: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who knows that I support this cause. Although I cannot be here for the rest of the debate due to its late start, if there is a vote, I will certainly support this innocuous motion. The measures taken in 2011 actually benefited men just as much as women, but this is very much a women-focused injustice. Some 33% of men approaching retirement expect to rely on just a state pension, but the percentage for women is as much as 53%, which is why this issue is so important to them and to all of us.

**Ian Blackford**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention. He has been resolute on this matter over the past couple of years, and I know that the women are grateful for his support; I hope that he will be back for the vote later on. I am glad that he referred to the motion in front of us, because we had a choice of all sorts of things to lay before the House today, but the motion is laid in such a way—simply calling on the Government to put mitigation in place—that all the Members of Parliament who have shown support for the WASPI women can support it. Now is our only chance to show that we can stand up and do something for those women.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Ian Blackford**: I know that many Members want to speak, so I will make some progress and let people in later.

This is about women who have paid national insurance in anticipation of receiving a pension and have been hit with the bombshell that their pension was being deferred—in some cases by up to six years—with only 15 months' written notice. Members should dwell on that. They were looking forward to retirement, but they received a letter telling them that they were going to get as little as 15 months' notice of an increase in their pension age. Can anybody on the Government Benches defend that? Will anybody stand up and tell the House and the public that giving someone 15 months' written notice of an increase in their pension age is acceptable? Is anyone prepared to do that? If so, I will happily give way.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con) *rose—*

**Hon. Members**: Ah!

**James Cartlidge**: We recognise people's concerns about the notice, but to rectify the situation requires public funds. In a previous debate, the right hon. Gentleman said that his party's position was to pay for that from the surplus in the national insurance fund. Is that still his party's policy?

**Ian Blackford**: Well, there we are. Given the opportunity to defend the indefensible, we again get spin. Let me make things absolutely crystal clear. The national insurance fund is sitting at a surplus in the region of £30 billion, and that surplus has been generated by the women who have paid national insurance. All that we have asked for is that the women be given what they are entitled to receive. A pension should be seen as a right, but the Government have changed the terms and conditions of that right without consulting those who have paid in for a pension. As many of the campaigners have said, "We paid in, you pay out."

This campaign is at the heart of SNP policy. We have long fought for the Government to rectify the shambles and give the WASPI women the pensions they rightfully deserve. I speak on behalf of SNP Members when I say that we will never rest until justice is delivered for the women affected. The Government have failed time and time again to address the injustices of a lack of notice for the acceleration of the state pension age. There is an opportunity today for the Government to admit that effective notice was not given of an increase in pensionable age. The process of increasing pensionable age must be slowed down.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is speaking with his customary passion on this issue, which he says is at the heart of Scottish National party thinking. I am not an expert on devolved powers, but my understanding from reading the legislation is that the Scottish Government have the powers to rectify this issue if they so wish. He chastises the Treasury Bench for a lack of action, but we have seen no action from Holyrood that could give a lead to the Government.

**Ian Blackford**: There we have it. Does anybody here think the Scottish Government have power to introduce pensions? [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] I will tell the House why: it is because we do not have the powers. It is about time that Conservative Members stopped creating the impression that we have that power.

Let me be absolutely crystal clear. Power over pensions is reserved to Westminster. There is a bit of a clue, because pensions are paid out of national insurance. I would love the Scottish Government to have control over national insurance. Let me make it clear that if we had control over pensions in Scotland, we would make sure that the WASPI women in Scotland got what is rightfully theirs.

**Simon Hoare**: The Scotland Act 2016 does not preclude the right hon. Gentleman—

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Pensions are reserved.

**Simon Hoare**: I agree entirely that pensions are reserved, but discretionary payments could be made by the Scottish Government. Why have they not done so?

**Ian Blackford:** There is a very simple answer. I have respect for the hon. Gentleman, as he knows, and he should go back and read the 2016 Act, because it is crystal clear that we cannot introduce new benefits, nor can we introduce payments based on age. The fundamental point that needs to be made is that we are talking about the state pension in the United Kingdom, which is a reserved matter. It ill behoves any Conservative Member to try to create the impression that the people of Scotland and elsewhere have powers that we do not have. If Conservative Members want the Scottish Government to have the powers to fix this, then give us the powers. Give us control over pensions and we will fix it tomorrow.

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman has asked us to tell him what powers the Scottish Government have to help in this situation. Well, under section 28 of the Scotland Act they can create a new benefit, and they can make that argument on the basis of, but not because of, old age—the Department for Work and Pensions has accepted that argument. Further, section 26 allows the Scottish Government to make short-term payments to people who need them, “to avoid a risk to the well-being of an individual.”

The Scottish Government have the powers. They choose not to use them. [*Interruption.*]

**Ian Blackford:** The hon. Gentleman should— [*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker** (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I want to hear the right hon. Gentleman. I was about to try to quieten down the House in order that I might be able to hear him, but I realise that most of the noise is coming from those behind him. He is making an important speech, and those behind him are trying to support him, but they are being a bit noisy about it.

**Ian Blackford:** The simple fact is that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government do not have the ability to introduce new benefits based on age. What is really important, and the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) should reflect on this, is that this is a failure of UK Government policy. Nobody can get away from that. Are the Conservatives in Scotland really saying that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government should again clear up the mess left by this Conservative Government? The Scottish Government have already spent £400 million mitigating the worst effects of Tory austerity.

That is the reality— [*Interruption.*] I see the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) chuntering. Maybe he could answer this question. Was he one of those who signed the WASPI pledge? Did he say to his voters that he would stand up for the WASPI women? If he is true to his word, he has to come through the Lobby with us this afternoon, or his words will be shown to be meaningless and a fraud on the people of his constituency.

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am concerned that the right hon. Gentleman is not willing to listen to Government Front Benchers. I am sympathetic to the WASPI women, of whom there are nearly 10,000 on the Isle of Wight, but the reality is that he can do something about it, but he will not. He is not taking interventions because he would rather score political points than fix this problem.

**Ian Blackford:** That is pathetic, absolutely pathetic, because it demonstrates well and truly that the hon. Gentleman has not been listening. I have listened to Government Front Benchers in debate after debate in which they have been given the opportunity to do something about this. We introduced costed proposals in the last Parliament. The Minister, like countless Ministers before him, wants to sit on his hands. He wants this issue to go away, and I can tell him that this issue is not going away.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Ian Blackford:** I will make progress before giving way again.

The Government have an opportunity today to do something about it. I remind the House that 250 Members of Parliament have presented petitions on behalf of WASPI women. That is 250 Members of Parliament who I expect to go through the Aye Lobby tonight. There is no point signing a petition unless they are prepared to go through the Lobby, otherwise they have duped the WASPI women. I trust that no Member would wish to do that.

Our motion is a simple one. It calls for mitigation. It is written in a way that allows all Members of Parliament to recognise the injustice that women born in the 1950s are facing, and it allows the Government to bring forward proposals. Let me state at the beginning of this debate that if parliamentary democracy means anything, the House must divide on this motion. The Government must either support mitigation, which we are calling on them to do, or they must have the guts to vote against it.

Now is the time for Members on both sides of the House to signal that we need to put mitigation in place. Let us stand up today for 1950s women, because I believe parliamentary arithmetic is on our side.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Blackford:** I will give way one more time.

**Mr Cunningham:** I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He and I have been involved in a lot of debates. I think the Government can find this money. It is no good their trying to blame the Scottish Parliament. This is a UK issue, full stop. I assure him that I will be backing him in the Lobby today.

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hoped he would be backing me, and he has been resolute on this issue over a long period of time. He is absolutely right; we can find money on the magic money tree for Northern Ireland and, as I said in the Budget debate only last week, we found £70 billion for quantitative easing last year. A £70 billion cheque was written for the Bank of England to put into the financial markets, so do not tell us that the Government cannot find the money. Of course, the answer to the question is that the money is there because the national insurance fund is sitting on a surplus.

**James Cartlidge:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian Blackford:** I must make some progress. I will not take interventions for a while.

The moment has never been so opportune for Members on both sides of the House to come together to do the right thing and to call for this long-standing error to be corrected. Conservative Members made a pledge to the WASPI women as recently as June 2017. Scottish Tory Members—I will not name them, but they know who they are—signed the WASPI pledge before the general election and claimed to be prepared to act against party orders on the issue. There has been a deafening silence from them on this matter since the election, and the heckling has gone.

The House might be interested to know that, in the constituencies represented by Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament, a total of 84,000 women are affected by this Government's legislative changes. I ask this question of the Scottish Tories, in a friendly spirit, particularly to those who supported the WASPI women during the campaign: will they have the courage to join us in the Lobby this afternoon, or will they turn their backs on the 84,000 WASPI women in their own constituencies?

I flag up to them page 62 of the Scottish Conservative manifesto, which states:

“We will also ensure that the state pension age reflects increases in life expectancy, while protecting each generation fairly.”

So, today, Scots Tories, do the right thing.

**Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con):** The nub of the matter is that people are living longer and contributions were calculated on the basis of people not living so long. Although I sympathise with what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, the debt burden would be increased on our children and grandchildren, and that is grossly unfair.

**Ian Blackford:** I am stunned. [*Interruption.*] I am speechless, because we should put that out in a leaflet. We are not talking about tea and sympathy; we are talking about WASPI women having to rely on benefits, and they are going to get nothing from the hon. Gentleman—that is crystal clear. It is obvious where he stands on this issue.

Today, these Tories should deliver the generational fairness they promised in their manifesto. I sincerely welcome the backing of some 37 Conservative MPs who expressed support for WASPI women during the general election—37 Tory MPs signed the pledge. We will be watching this afternoon, as will the WASPI women, and these MPs will be expected to do what they promised in the election campaign and stand up for the WASPI women. That support stretches from the Tory Back Benches across to the Benches of the Democratic Unionist party—to our friends from the DUP. Page 9 of the DUP manifesto contained a pledge to protect pensions, with the announcement that the DUP would:

“Support an end to the unfair treatment of women pensioners”.

I call on DUP Members to deliver on their pledges made to the WASPI women.

**Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** I am disappointed at the tone that has been set in this debate. Despite the fact that we have a motion that could command widespread support, the tone of the debate has not been as I expected. Let me make something clear: we made a manifesto pledge on this issue, and the reason why I am here as my party's spokesman is that we do support this and we will go through the Lobby on it. However, the WASPI women would be better served if we had a

debate that was not divisive and not about point scoring, because there is no party—whether Labour, the Liberals or the Conservatives—that has not caused some of this problem.

**Ian Blackford:** I am grateful that DUP Members will be going through the Lobby, but let me point out that we are trying to set out the facts of the arguments in this House. These women have for too long been let down by politicians, so let us use the opportunity we have today to give them the result they deserve. Thanks to freedom of information requests, we learned that the Department for Work and Pensions only began writing to women born between April 1950 and April 1955 in April 2009, and did not complete the process until February 2012. So it was writing to women to inform them about changes in legislation that go back to 1995 but it did not start the formal notification period for 14 years. Taking 14 years to begin informing women that a pension they had paid into was being deferred is quite something. Can we imagine the outcry if a private pension provider was behaving in such a way? There would be an outcry in this House and, no doubt, legal action. When we consider that entitlement to a state pension is earned through national insurance contributions, where many women have made contributions over 40 years, this is stunning.

A woman born on 6 April 1953 who, under the previous legislation, would have retired on 6 April 2013 would have received a letter from the DWP in January 2012 with the bombshell that she would not be retiring then—she would be retiring in July 2016. That is three years and three months later than she might have expected, and this is with 15 months' notice. That is what Conservative Members have been defending, and it is no wonder the WASPI women are insulted. We are talking about 15 months' notice before what they thought was a contract they had with the Government was simply to be ripped up.

A pensions White Paper published in December 1993 stated:

“In developing its proposals for implementing the change the Government has paid particular attention to the need to give people enough time to plan ahead and to phase the change in gradually”.

Not much there that I would disagree with, but when you accept the need for people to plan ahead, you need to write to them and tell them.

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab):** I am secretary of the all-party group on state pension inequality for women, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. A serious point for WASPI women is the number of women in their 60s who did not receive a letter. Their pensions were deferred until they were 63, even though they should have received them at 60, but they were not told at the time of those deferrals that they should have received them three years earlier. This is another scandal about how the DWP has not been honest in those letters. Does he agree that that is something else the Government should be looking to address?

**Ian Blackford:** Again, I am grateful for that intervention, and the hon. Gentleman is correct in what he says. This is yet another clear example of why there is absolutely no excuse for not collectively taking action today. We have

[Ian Blackford]

a choice: we can recognise the injustices that the women have faced or we can sit on our hands and do nothing. This is about morality. It is about doing the right thing. The Minister can look up to the skies, but it is not going to remove the problem for him. I do not want to wait until the end of the debate and then get another 10 minutes of ignoring the reality of what is going on. We have had that for too long and it has to stop—it has to stop today.

The intent was there in the 1993 White Paper, but it was 2009 before any formal letters went out. Then we have the issue of phasing this in gradually. What we are dealing with is an increase in a woman's pensionable age by three months for each calendar month that passes. It is simply scandalous that a woman's pensionable age is increasing so rapidly. It is indefensible and it is not within the spirit outlined in the Government's White Paper in 1993.

In October 2002, while giving evidence to a Select Committee, the DWP suggested that the role of the state was

“to provide clear and accurate information about what pensions will provide so that people will understand how much they can expect at retirement before it's too late to do something about it.”

How does “before it's too late to do something about it” equate with 15 months' notice? How can the Minister, and how can anyone who is not going to support our motion today, support that lack of notice? It has gone quiet now, has it not?

**James Cartlidge:** The right hon. Gentleman has to find a way to pay for this and he did say that he would still use the national insurance fund. Ruth Kelly, the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said the following in 2003:

“The national insurance fund provides security for those contributory benefits. It is ring-fenced and cannot be used for other Government expenditure.”—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2003; Vol. 411, c. 231WH.]

**Ian Blackford:** The hon. Gentleman is going to have to do better. Of course this is ring-fenced—it is for pensions. Pay it out! That is what the Government are being asked to do. As I was saying, no formal communication took place until 2009 and the task was not completed until 2012. The DWP has to take responsibility for this failure to communicate and, crucially, for the lack of time that women have had to prepare for an increase in their state pension age. Rather than recognising that women deserved to be communicated with directly, the DWP issued leaflets headlined “Equality in state pension age”. Can anybody in this Chamber remember them? No, I do not recall seeing them either. That is no surprise, as DWP-commissioned research in 2004 highlighted that only 2% of respondents mentioned that they had been notified of changes to their pension age via a leaflet. That is the responsibility that the Government took to inform people. Frankly, it is an insult that the Government at the time thought that changes that affect a woman's retirement age could be delivered with a leaflet. That was an abdication of responsibility and we have to take responsibility for that. We should all receive an annual statement from the DWP on our expected entitlement, just as we do from private pension providers.

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

**Ian Blackford:** I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I have to move on because of the time.

The failure to communicate was highlighted by a 2004 DWP report called “Public awareness of State Pension age equalisation”, which stated that only 43%—less than half—of all women affected by the increase in state pensionable age were aware of the impact on them. If the Government accept that women were not informed in a timely manner and therefore did not have time to react, why do they not accept their responsibilities? I am watching the Minister and he is looking away. He is not interested because he simply does not want to hear the facts. When will he accept his responsibility for the WASPI women and engage in a constructive manner?

The Government sent out 17.8 million letters on automatic state pension forecasts to men and women between May 2003 and November 2006 but—wait for it—the letters did not contain any information about state pension age. You simply could not make this up. What they did say was:

“If you want to know more about the changes to State Pension age, please see *Pensions for women—Your guide*... See page 10 for details about how you can get a copy of this guide.”

That, Minister, was no way to convey information. What should have been communicated was accurate, clear and transparent information. It was yet another failure to do that by the Minister's Department—another massive failure to communicate from Government. What is he going to do about it? Nothing.

On 23 November 2016, in answer to a written question I submitted, the previous Pensions Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), stated:

“The Government has committed not to change the legislation relating to State Pension age for those people who are within 10 years of reaching it. This provides these individuals with the certainty they need to plan for the future... We recognise the importance of ensuring people are aware of any changes to their State Pension age”.

I welcomed that statement, but that recognition of the need to ensure that people are aware of changes was not afforded to 1950s women. If that statement from the previous Minister in 2016 is to have any credibility, the current Minister has to accept that the women affected were not given that courtesy and the Government need to correct that today.

I shall set the socioeconomic scene in which female pensioners find themselves under this Tory Government. Only 52% of women are adequately saving for retirement, compared with 60% of men. Female pensioners have a net weekly income that is approximately 85% of that of their male counterparts. More than two thirds of pensioners who are living in poverty are women. In August, the Institute for Fiscal Studies revealed that the increase in state pension age has left 1.1 million women £50 a week worse off. The IFS looked into the Government's reform of the state pension, which was needed to account for a longer-living population, and found that the move to increase the eligibility age for women from 60 to 63 meant that income poverty rates were “pushed up substantially” from 15% to 20%. That is just as a result of the increase in the pension age from 60 to 63. Is the Minister going

to defend that? Are the Tory MPs from Scotland, bearing in mind their constituents, going to defend that? There has been an 8.7% rise in the chance of a woman aged 60 to 63 being in absolute poverty.

In my constituency of Ross, Skye and Lochaber, there are 5,400 women who were born in the 1950s and are affected by the changes to the state pension age in 1995, 2007 and 2011. Throughout Scotland, the figure is a staggering 347,000. New freedom-of-information figures have revealed that although almost 4,600 maladministration complaints relating to WASPI women have been received by officials at the DWP, only six investigations have been concluded. The process of dealing with the complaints has taken so long partly because the DWP has only three staff members dealing with the complaints. Three staff members dealing with 4,600 complaints—that is how seriously the Government are taking this issue. The delays have been so long that the pensions ombudsman has now forced the independent case examiner to streamline the process. What a farce! That is an indication that the Government simply do not take their responsibilities to the WASPI women seriously—another let down from this Government for 1950s WASPI women. The Government have a commitment to the WASPI women and should stop playing fast and loose with their rights.

In a Westminster Hall debate on 5 July, the Minister talked about employment or retraining opportunities for 1950s women, stating—wait for it—that the Government had “extended apprenticeship opportunities”. There we have it: women who in some cases have worked for more than 40 years can go on apprenticeship schemes. Later in his speech, the Minister claimed:

“I realise it is not going down well”.—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2017; Vol. 626, c. 143WH.]

It is little wonder, because 1950s women do not want apprenticeship schemes; they want their pensions.

Women born in the 1950s do not want to be pushed on to benefits, but that is what is happening. Between August 2013 and August 2017, the number of people claiming jobseeker’s allowance or universal credit across all ages fell by 42%. We welcome that, but the number of 60s-plus women claiming a benefit rose by 9,500—a 115% increase—while the number of women aged over 60 claiming employment and support allowance increased by 121,000. That is a massive increase of 413%—that is the reality of the sharp increase in the state pension age for women. The reality is that women are being denied their pension and this Government are forcing them on to benefits. The Minister has been ridiculed by, among others, the *Financial Times*, in which he was described as one in

“a line of pensions ministers with no interest in pensions”.

He certainly has no interest in women’s pensions. Today, the Minister must start to take an interest and do the right thing by putting mitigation in place.

It is nothing short of a disgrace that the Government found no remedy for the WASPI women in last week’s Budget. The Chancellor stood at the Dispatch Box and extolled the virtues of spending billions on Brexit, but he failed to address the injustice faced by female pensioners. Transitional measures to mitigate the issue would cost significantly less than the UK Government’s £30 billion figure. Last year, independent research commissioned by the SNP showed that the cost would be £8 billion.

We can find billions for Brexit and billions for Trident, but not one penny for our pensioners, who are treated with contempt by the Government. It is bitterly disappointing that the Chancellor did not use the Budget to support the WASPI women. Once again, it falls to the SNP, by securing this debate, to be a voice for this campaign in the House and to press the UK Government to do the decent thing. They have got it wrong—admit it and fix it now.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the Minister, I should warn Members who wish to take part in the debate that time is of course limited. In order that they might tailor their proposed speeches accordingly, there will be a time limit of three minutes.

3.27 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** Since world war two, we have seen a dramatic change in life expectancy. We are living longer, staying healthier, fighting diseases that previously would have killed us and leading a more active lifestyle, regardless of age. Faced with demographic pressures and increased life expectancy and costs, successive Governments have acted. We must be realistic about the demographic and fiscal challenge that these changes create for us as a society.

Taking forward-looking action is critical to protecting the long-term sustainability of the state pension not only for today’s taxpayers, but for future generations. In July, the Government published their first review of the state pension age, which sets out a coherent strategy targeted at strengthening and sustaining the UK state pension system for many decades to come. It accepts the key recommendations of John Cridland’s independent review, which consulted a variety of people and organisations, including the Scottish National party—the bringing forward to 2037 to 2039 of the increase in state pension age from 67 to 68.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** Will the Minister explain to the House the potential debt impact on future generations of spending up to £39 billion reverting to the 1995 timetable, as well as of Labour’s plan to freeze any increases in the state pension age, which would cost hundreds of billions?

**Guy Opperman:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I recognise that he has more than 25 years’ experience of working in the pensions industry through his previous journalistic work. The reality is that if the Pensions Acts 1995 and 2011 were to be revoked, it would cost well in excess of £70 billion. If we were to follow the path set out in the Labour party manifesto, which would keep the state pension age at 66, it would cost approximately £250 billion compared with the itinerary set out by the independent review commissioned by the Government and produced by John Cridland.

The Cridland review is very clear on that point. It says:

“In 1917 King George V sent the first telegrams to those celebrating their 100th birthday. 24 were sent that year. In 2016 around 6,000 people will have received a card from Her Majesty the Queen. In 2050, we expect over 56,000 people to reach this milestone.

[Guy Opperman]

Three factors are at play here: a growing population; an ageing population as the Baby Boomers retire; and an unprecedented increase in life expectancy. A baby girl born in 2017 can expect to live to be 94 years and a boy to be 91. By 2047 it could well be 98 and 95 respectively...The world of the Third Age is now a very different one, in which those lucky enough to get the State Pension will on average spend almost a third of their adult life in retirement, a proportion never before reached."

It was clear that the Government had to act.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Can the Minister tell us what specific help Jobcentre Plus is able to give older women to help them to retrain or to reskill to find age-appropriate work? That is a question that a number of older women often ask. What specific help is out there for them?

**Guy Opperman:** Having visited his local jobcentre, my hon. Friend will be aware that a great deal of assistance is provided by the job coaches. However, help comes not just from job coaches and jobcentres but from local job clubs, which I am sure exist in his constituency, as they do in mine; from individual flexible working arrangements; and from jobs fairs, which a number of colleagues have mentioned. I have done three myself, culminating in the last one in September, which was highly successful. There is also all manner of private sector support on an ongoing basis.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Guy Opperman:** I will give way in a moment, but first let me address the issue in relation to Scotland. I was surprised that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) refused 10 times to give way. If I were him, I would say that he was frit, but I will not go down that route.

In addition to the substantial support that the UK Government are providing, which is worth £50 billion across the country and 6% of GDP, the Scottish Government now have significant new powers available to them to tailor welfare provision to people in Scotland. Although pensions remain a reserved matter, the Scotland Act 2016 has given the Scottish Government the ability to use a wide range of new welfare provisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) correctly set out the provisions of section 28 of the Scotland Act. There are of course section 24 powers as well. I refer all colleagues, on both sides of the House, to a letter written to my predecessor by Jeane Freeman, my opposite number in the Scottish Government. She says that the power under section 26 "is limited to providing help with 'short term needs', and those needs must require to be met to avoid a risk to a person's wellbeing. That would not readily allow assistance to the majority of women most affected by the acceleration of increase in their State Pension Age. Their needs and the risks to their well-being would have to be assessed individually."

There is an acceptance in that letter that, as Scottish Conservative colleagues have said, the powers are there. Those powers commenced on 5 September 2016. It is up to the Scottish Government to determine how they will use those powers, but—

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am asking for your guidance about what we can do, because the Minister, perhaps inadvertently, is

seeking to mislead the House. It is absolutely crystal clear in the Scotland Act 2016 that the Scottish Parliament is not in a position to introduce benefits by reason of old age. That is quite clear, and the Minister should be truthful with the people of this country. He should stop blaming the Scottish National party and the Scottish Government for a responsibility that solely lies here with Westminster.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I will first answer the original point of order. First of all, of course the Minister is being truthful. Secondly, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) knows that this subject is a matter for debate.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was just going to observe the contradiction that it is impossible to, as the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said, "inadvertently seek" to mislead the House. One either misleads the House seeking to do so or not.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that helpful advice. I suggest that we move on, because time is very limited and we do not want to delay the debate further with continuous points of order.

**Guy Opperman:** I fully understand, and I will move on, but I will make one single point in reply to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. I specifically read the letter of 22 June from Jeane Freeman, quoting what she said. When the right hon. Gentleman criticises me, he should be aware and conscious that he is criticising someone from his own party.

**Ross Thomson:** Regarding the point of order, does the Minister agree that the argument can be made that people under the retirement age of 66 are not in old age? The Scottish Government have already been in correspondence with the Department for Work and Pensions, and the DWP has accepted that very argument. The Scottish Government have the powers, they just do not use them.

**Guy Opperman:** The reality of the situation, given the motion facing us today, is that one has to ask what the Scottish Government are doing. My hon. Friend is entirely right.

The issue dates back to 1995, when the Government legislated after two years of debate and consultation to equalise the state pension age in order to eliminate gender inequalities in state pensions. There had been welcome increases in life expectancy, and there was an anticipated increase in the number of pensioners in the years to come.

**David Linden:** Will the Minister give way?

**Guy Opperman:** I will give way for the last time. I am conscious that 20 Members wish to speak.

**David Linden:** I have come through an apprenticeship on how this works. The Minister made a point about jobcentres, but he is actually closing half of Glasgow's jobcentres. I have a question for him about life

expectancy—I asked him this 10 days ago in Westminster Hall, so he has had 10 days to find out the answer. Can he tell me the life expectancy in Glasgow East?

**Guy Opperman:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, without a shadow of a doubt, life expectancy has increased in all parts of the country and in all socioeconomic groups over the past 30 years. I refer him to the Cridland report, which accepts the situation that has existed for the past 30 years, and the change that has been made.

Developments in policy have included the Pensions Act 1995, as well as the Pensions Act 2007, passed when the Labour party was in power. It is a shame that the Labour party is now scrapping the fiscal prudence that it seemed to demonstrate with the 2007 Act by now revoking its desire to increase the pension age beyond 66. Under the coalition, action was taken in the Pensions Act 2011 to increase the pension age as a result of enhanced life expectancy.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Guy Opperman:** I will not give way any more, because I am conscious that 20 Members wish to speak.

Automatic enrolment was introduced in 2012 on a cross-party basis after a considerable amount of time. The important point is that the overall participation in workplace pensions of eligible female employees in 2012 was 58% but, following the introduction of automatic enrolment, the figure increased to 80% in 2016. For males, the figure increased from 52% to 76% in the same period. The private sector has seen the largest increase in participation in workplace pensions, and there was no gender gap in participation rates in 2016.

In the circumstances, I would respectfully point out that the key choice a Government face when seeking to control state pension spend is whether to increase the state pension age or to pay lower pensions, with an inevitable impact on pensioner poverty. The only alternative is to ask the working generation to pay an even larger share of their income to support pensions.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Guy Opperman:** I am not going to give way again—I am so sorry.

While increasing longevity is something to be celebrated, we must also be realistic about the demographic and fiscal challenges it creates for us as a society. Since the early 2000s, it has been widely recognised that we face big questions as a society about how we ensure economic security for people in retirement, while maintaining fairness between generations.

The Pensions Commission found in 2005 that a state pension age fixed at 65 was no longer sustainable or affordable. Between 2007 and 2014, three separate Acts of Parliament were introduced, each responding to changes in life expectancy by changing the state pension age. At the same time, the state pension has been increased, between 2010 and 2017, by £1,250 a year for an individual who is on a full state pension.

So with increasing financial pressures, as I have described, we cannot change a policy that has been implemented for over 22 years and supported by all three major political parties. The Government have to ensure that the costs of an ageing population are shared out fairly, without placing an unfair financial burden on future generations.

3.40 pm

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I despair, because having stood at this Dispatch Box, led for the Opposition in Westminster Hall debates and worked on the Pension Schemes Bill, with the matter before us taking centre stage, I have spoken about this issue, like a lot of other Members, many times. However, it is not the Scottish National party that I blame for that, nor is it members of the Labour party, and it is definitely not the '50s-born women who have been energetic, consistent and strong in pushing this issue.

The Conservative party is the reason we are debating this topic yet again, but we know that many Conservative MPs pledged their support for these women by making speeches, by taking up photo opportunities, and by becoming members of the all-party group. A few months ago, I stood here and highlighted the fact that there were no fewer than 37 of them. Among them are the hon. Members for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), for Salisbury (John Glen), for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan)—that is just nine of them.

This weak Government continue to stick their head in the sand and hope that the issue will go away. I do not know how many more times I or anyone else has to say this to the Minister: the issue is not going away.

I am frustrated and impatient that we are yet again debating this topic when the Government could do something to fix the problem right now. I do not understand the politics of why the Government refuse to address it. They angered the older generation during the general election, and look what happened: their huge predicted majority failed to materialise, and now they are hanging on by the skin of their teeth.

**Helen Goodman:** My hon. Friend is making a very good case. As a 1950s woman, I am extremely sympathetic to the 4,000 WASPI women in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that what the Government have failed to understand is that some of these women have been working since they were 15?

**Alex Cunningham:** That is most certainly the case, and the Government need to understand that. My wife herself has been working since that young age.

For some reason, the Government persist in pushing huge numbers of '50s-born women into financial difficulty and distress. It is time for the Government to put their pride aside and do what is right.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for acknowledging the financial plight of many of these women. Women in my constituency have been forced to sell or remortgage their homes, and to spend the money they had set aside for retirement

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

now so that they can exist, which will increase the poverty they experience in retirement. That has not been acknowledged at all by the Government.

**Alex Cunningham:** Indeed it has not, and I am sure we will hear many such examples in the debate.

I have heard stories from numerous women affected by the changes of their desperation and fear—and it is fear—about how they will cope in poverty as they wait even longer for their state pension. Does the Minister understand how difficult it is for a woman in her 60s to retrain and gain employment? The job market and the skills needed in today's workplace are very different from what they were 40 years ago.

**Grahame Morris:** My hon. Friend is making powerful points. Does he agree that the Government have an opportunity to act while the ball is in their court and before the collective action for maladministration compels them to act?

**Alex Cunningham:** That is the case, and I will refer to that matter later in my speech.

We have a system that does not help older people to retrain and get back into meaningful employment. The welfare system has been torn to pieces, disabled people have been humiliated through repeated assessments, and the state pension is becoming increasingly difficult to access.

The Labour party has laid out the approach that we would take to reduce the strain on vulnerable and struggling women. We would extend pension credit to those who were due to retire before the increase in the pension age. That would alleviate the toughest circumstances, and restore the faith and dignity that many people feel they have lost. It would provide support worth up to £155 a week to half a million of the most vulnerable women affected by the increase in the state pension age. We have also proposed allowing those who have been affected to receive their state pension up to two years early at a reduced rate, to give women the choice over what works best for them.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** I have a great deal of sympathy for the women concerned, but the issue is how we pay for this—I know that is not something the Labour party tends to concern itself with a great deal. I would support taking money from the overseas aid budget to provide transitional arrangements for these women. Will the shadow Minister show his concern for these women by agreeing to that, or does he put overseas aid ahead of the WASPI women?

**Alex Cunningham:** We know fine and well that as GDP goes down, the amount of money spent overseas also reduces. The poor overseas also need support. If we need to find this money, we can start by looking within British budgets.

Why do the Government not look at our proposals? Why do they not give these women some hope? We heard from the Minister that the Government's position is that they will not make further concessions, but I urge him to go back to the Secretary of State after the debate and persuade him to think again.

Earlier this year, the Secretary of State said that he and the Department for Work and Pensions would look into individual cases of hardship. We know from a freedom of information request that the DWP has concluded just a handful of complaint investigations relating to the '50s-born women campaign, although more than 4,500 complaints were received. Will the Minister update the House about the progress on those complaints?

**Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP):** Is not the real problem demonstrated by my constituent who wrote to me a fortnight ago? She was born in 1954, has been in insecure, low-paid work, and has no access to an occupational pension or savings. The Government must address this issue.

**Alex Cunningham:** I said a few minutes ago that we would hear many examples of the plight faced by '50s-born women, and that is yet another one.

Although I agree that this mess was created by the Government, I want to touch on the Scottish Government's social security powers. I know that there have been some heated exchanges on this subject already. The SNP says that it cannot act to resolve the issue in Scotland because pension provision is reserved to the UK Government. Although that is true, the Scotland Act 2016 gave the SNP Government powers to top up social security or to create new social security policies. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) denied that they have the power to introduce new benefits based on age, so will the Minister commit this afternoon to publishing a clear paper outlining exactly what the Government believe the Scottish Government can and cannot do with their powers. Perhaps that would make the matter clear once and for all.

Labour has made a commitment to extend pension credit and provide early access to a state pension, but we cannot deliver that because we are not in government. Therefore, there has to be a challenge to our SNP colleagues: use your powers to help women north of the border and, if they are insufficient, chat to the Government, because they believe you do have the powers.

**Mhairi Black:** I do not think that anyone on the SNP Benches feels the need for any clarification, because it is already there. We all remember vividly how it was the Conservatives and—it is unfortunate I have to say this, because I am not trying to make a party point—the Labour party that made sure that we did not have power over pensions.

**Alex Cunningham:** Nobody suggested that the Scottish Government had pension powers; we are saying that they could use social security policy. I suggest again that the Scottish Government chats to the UK Government. I think they just need to get their heads together and talk rationally, but I would rather the UK Government published a paper spelling out the position.

I do not want to keep having to stand here debating this issue. I do not want us to give false hope to the '50s-born women who are fighting, because it is their livelihoods we are talking about. I want the Minister to do something—to reach out across the Chamber and work for a real solution—to demonstrate that the House is listening to the residents of this country.

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

**Alex Cunningham:** I am nearly finished. Before I conclude, I would like to ask the Minister what the Department is doing in relation to the legal challenge from the WASPI campaigners, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). Has the Minister made contingencies for the day when the courts rule against the Government, as they may well do, and order that '50s-born women be compensated? What is happening in relation to that?

Although we support the motion, I think that the House needs to be able to vote on a motion that will be binding on the Government.

**Guy Opperman:** I will answer two of the hon. Gentleman's points. First, the Government do not believe that there has been maladministration by the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to the legal claim by Bindmans, and that includes in the 13 years when the Labour party was in power. Secondly, with regard to his assertions about the Scottish Government, the situation is as I said when I cited the letter of 22 June from Jeane Freeman, my opposite number in the Scottish Government.

**Alex Cunningham:** I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, but he knows as well as I do that the decisions of successive Governments are overturned in the courts time and time again, and the then Government end up having to pay for it.

I want to see before the House a motion that actually means something, and that is binding on the Government to deliver some of the relief that these women desperately need. We will continue to look for that opportunity, and then we will call on the supporters of '50s-born women, from both sides of the House, to vote for that relief and make something happen.

3.52 pm

**Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** We have debated this matter on numerous occasions. It is important that it is not used for the purpose of political expediency, because many people are experiencing serious challenges. We must listen to them and seek to address their concerns in a way that is responsible and financially prudent, but also just and fair.

I have received a great deal of correspondence over the past two years from constituents who have graphically highlighted the challenge that they face. When many of us presented petitions in the Chamber last autumn, I was in second place behind the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for the number of people who had signed, as the Waveney petition was signed by just under 2,250. It was also endorsed unanimously by Conservative-run Waveney District Council.

The impact of the changes is being felt disproportionately in areas of the UK where there has been a tradition of women going out to work—whether in factories, agriculture, fishing, food processing or clerical posts—often part time and not on high salaries. The changes are affecting a lot of women and their families in Lowestoft in my constituency, although many of the businesses in which they worked are no longer there. There used to be, for example, numerous jobs in the fishing support industry and the Sanyo television factory, to name but two.

I acknowledge the challenges that the Government face in addressing those injustices and in coming up with a fair and affordable solution that complies with equalities legislation. I urge them to look carefully at that. There are two private Members' Bills before Parliament that propose a review of the pension arrangements. One is promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and the other has been presented by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). I am a supporter of the latter Bill, and I urge the Government to consider carrying out a full, proper and meaningful review. For that reason, I will not support the motion tonight, because I do not believe that it provides the evidence base that we need to find a fair, affordable and just solution.

As I have mentioned, this issue disproportionately affects specific parts of the country. I thus ask the Government to carry out research to establish the extent of this problem and to come up with a fair and affordable solution that addresses the pockets of the country in which there is a real issue.

3.54 pm

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** The last time I spoke on this matter, I said that I welcomed the opportunity to make another contribution on the WASPI issue, but that was over 18 months ago, and I do not welcome having to make this argument again. It is absolutely ridiculous that this Government have refused to help these women, whose only crime is to have been born in the 1950s. Although the original mistake goes back to 1995, Governments of different persuasions have been culpable. We can sit here and squabble all day about who has done what and who is most to blame, but the problem is in the here and now. The reality is kicking in for 6,200 women in Paisley and Renfrewshire North, and for more than 3.7 million women and their families across the UK, so it falls to this Government to fix the mess.

I do, however, welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the WASPI campaign once again. All these women are asking for is fairness. This is the 11th time that their plight has been debated in this House, and we have had many ministerial responses, which have ranged from the incompetent to the ridiculous and everything in between. I was hoping for a better speech from the Minister given the arithmetic of the House, the natural majority in favour of transitional arrangements, and the—to say the least—precarious position of this Prime Minister and this Government.

I have had discussions with Conservative Members and overheard conversations about this issue in which Members have conceded that this has been bungled. They accepted that many women affected by this reform were only told about the changes 14 years after they made, but said it was just too darn expensive to do anything about it. However, times have changed. The Chancellor has found his magic money tree, with £1 billion for the Democratic Unionist party and £3.7 billion for Brexit preparations—a billion pounds here and a billion pounds there: before you know it, it is real money. We have had billions for wasteful spending and cash for votes, but nothing for these women, who have paid into the system all their lives.

With inflation rising faster than at any point in recent years, many of the women affected will face further burdens in relation to their cost of living. It is now more

[Gavin Newlands]

vital than ever that they are supported, which is why SNP Members will not stop until justice is done. The Chancellor's Budget was a huge missed opportunity to deliver protection for the WASPI women. As he continues to shirk his responsibility, I hope that the Scottish Tories, who were keen to support the WASPI campaign while seeking election, will vote with their consciences, rather than rubber-stamping the line sent to them by the Whips Office.

In conclusion, I want to echo the words of the former Member for Foyle, Mark Durkan, who has been a great loss to this House. In an impassioned contribution in one of our previous WASPI debates, he said:

"If we fail to pass this motion, we will be saying that those women are an acceptable casualty on the way to equality, and we cannot accept invidious treatment in the name of equality."—[*Official Report*, 7 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 503.]

3.57 pm

**Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): Equalising the state pension age between men and women is a principle about which the UK Government, the WASPI campaign and I am sure all of us in the Chamber agree. However, there is rightly concern about the unfair and disproportionate impact of the 2011 reforms on women born in the 1950s, and this concern is shared by Members on both sides of the House.

Some 5,200 women in my constituency are affected. Since the general election in June, as Members might imagine, I have been meeting local women who are affected by the changes and who, in some cases, have had to change their retirement plans radically because they were not made properly aware of the changes made by 1995 Act.

One constituent I recently met was employed by NHS Grampian for 39 years. She worked hard and full time for her whole working life, with no maternity leave and no long-term sick leave, until in 2014, during her last few years of work, she had to take a couple of months off for health reasons—first due to cancer of the womb, and subsequently cancer of the bone marrow. She requested retirement, and she was 60 on 1 December 2016, but because of the changes to state pension policy, she is not receiving a state pension, even though she paid in, in full, during her 39 years of working. This has caused her great strain and worry, and she is naturally concerned about her finances.

Last Friday, I met a 61-year-old constituent who expected to receive her state pension in 2016. She also contributed through national insurance for more than 40 years. When she received her first letter about the age changes from the DWP back in 2013, she was in full employment and good health, but her circumstances changed in 2015, when she was made redundant and diagnosed with breast cancer. I am thankful that my constituent has made a recovery following successful treatment to date, but she finds herself with no income, and the downturn in oil and gas in Aberdeen has made it very difficult for her to get even a job interview. At the moment, therefore, she has to rely on the very pot of savings that she worked hard to build up.

I wanted to highlight my constituents' cases as a reminder that the state pension system is founded on a contributory principle. It is not a welfare benefit. Those

cases show that this group of women have done the right thing. They worked hard all their lives and paid their dues in good faith, but now they face being completely short-changed. That is not fair.

We have heard a lot of bluster from SNP Members, but let us be clear that the Scottish Government have the powers to make a change. Their record clearly shows not only their incompetence, but their refusal to use those powers. Let us be absolutely clear: my constituents know that I will make their voices heard loud and clear in this place.

4 pm

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Here we go again: another day, another debate on the injustice facing the 1950s-born women as a result of the pension changes. More than 3 million women have lost out because of the changes to pension law, and more than 3,000 in my own constituency of Swansea East have been unfairly treated by the changes to the state pension.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of those women have worked in manual jobs since they were 15 years of age—some of them since they were 14—so they deserve fair play?

**Carolyn Harris**: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. These women have been the backbone of our country and they have been betrayed by this Government.

What is really scary is how many women do not realise that they have been affected. Yet this Government are still not listening. They have betrayed these women, stolen their security and shattered their dreams. Without the time to prepare and make the necessary alternative arrangements, very many women born in the 1950s have been left in financial despair.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On shattering lives, the life expectancy for women in my constituency is among the shortest on these islands. This is a brutal attack on their end-of-life progress, especially if they are living with a short-term condition that will come to a brutal end with no pension from the Government.

**Carolyn Harris**: It is cruel—there is no other word to describe the current state of play. These women have fought tirelessly for justice, but appallingly their cries for justice are falling on deaf ears.

I think that most people are aware of my passion for the campaign. Like the 1950s women, I am not going to give up. I know that they are not going to give up, either, so none of us is going away. And do you know what? The problem isn't going away either.

These 1950s women have been inexcusably disadvantaged by the handling and communication of the changes to the state pension, and some women will be as much as £40,000 out of pocket. These women have paid into the system since the 1960s. They paid in with the expectation that they would retire with a state pension at 60, but due to an abysmal lack of correspondence they find themselves severely out of pocket. They have not been given enough time to make alternative arrangements, and as a result very many are facing dire financial hardship.

**Dr Whitford:** Obviously, this is a UK-wide issue, not one that applies only to women in Scotland. The women I have spoken to are not looking for the kind of crisis grants that the Scottish Government can deliver. They do not want to go begging. They actually want what they are due.

**Carolyn Harris:** I do not want to get involved in the argument about what the Scottish Government can and cannot do, but I agree that this matter affects all women, regardless of their nationality.

Many in this House stand by these women. I call on the Government to make a commitment to look again at this gross injustice, to discuss a productive and constructive way forward for the women affected, and to listen to what we are saying.

Not all women are fit enough to work. Some women who are expected to jump through hoops before they can receive unemployment benefit do so risking their own physical and mental health.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) *rose*—

**Carolyn Harris:** I am going to make progress.

The reality is that these women are desperate. I have women affected all over the country calling my office every day, letting me know that they have had to sell their belongings and that they are relying on family, friends and food banks just to exist. I understand that this might not be comfortable to listen to, but it is the reality. These women are only asking for compassion, for fair play and, more importantly, for respect.

I will continue to call on the Government to stop burying their head in the sand and to do the right thing by these women. My private Member's Bill is due to have its Second Reading debate in April. It states that these women need reasonable, transitional arrangements to allow them not just to enjoy retirement, but to survive it. So many Members across the House agree that these changes to the state pension age are unjust and unfair, and that these women have been robbed of their pension. When will the Government recognise the mistake they have made with the 1950s women? These women will not be ignored.

4.6 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Over the past two and a half years I have met many constituents who have been directly affected by the various changes to the state pension age. Listening to them, it is impossible not to feel every sympathy, given the circumstances in which many find themselves. If I suddenly found out that I would not be able to retire at the age I had expected, I am not sure that I could say how I felt—actually, I probably could, but I fear my language would not be parliamentary.

As a teenage boy in the early 1990s, I probably did not pay as much attention to women's pensions as many other people did, but I do remember the announcement in 1993 that the state pension age would have to be equalised upwards. There was widespread publicity at the time, through the media and the leaflets that have been referred to. None the less, it is clear that many women, for one reason or another, were genuinely unaware

of that. As late as 2012, 6% of the women affected still expected to retire at 60, despite the Department for Work and Pensions having sent out 11 million leaflets and letters. However, that was significant progress since 2004, when just 73% of the women affected were aware of the 1995 reforms.

Clearly there are solid reasons why successive Governments here and in many other developed economies have been increasing and equalising the state pension age. The fact that even a relatively small proportion of people affected were unaware of changes that will have such a large impact on their retirement raises broader issues about how public authorities communicate pension matters, and Government at all levels need to consider that.

The truth is that the state pension age will not be reduced to 60—arguably, that would be illegal under anti-discrimination legislation—so we must look at what can be done not only to help those women born in the 1950s back into work, but to help all those who will find themselves working later in life. I hope that the Government can come up with further suggestions on what support can be provided.

4.9 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): When people ask me what it is like at Westminster, I often observe that I live in a parallel universe from the Tory party—I am sure its Members feel the same about me. We all inhabit a political bubble, but let me recall some of the concerns I have heard from Tories recently: whether Big Ben is going to bong, whether Clerks in the House are allowed to wear wigs, whether it is credible for MPs to ask questions in the Chamber without wearing a tie—these are some of the things that have concerned Tories recently. I have also heard them say that when they visit jobcentres people tell them, “It's great being on universal credit. When I'm on universal credit, I find work”. They do not see the irony that they are meeting these people in the jobcentre. The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), said that WASPI women should be able to get apprenticeships, and the Chancellor recently said that there were no unemployed people. They have also said that the majority of people knew about the changes to the pension age. They live in a different world from me.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What exactly is wrong with a 65-year-old woman taking up an apprenticeship? I am not talking about all women, but why would the hon. Gentleman deny any woman the chance to work at 65?

**Alan Brown:** That is a nonsense argument. I would hope that that woman would not get paid the apprenticeship levy. The Government have a shocking minimum wage for apprenticeships. The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) stood up during the Budget debate and said that the people of Taunton Deane had thousands of pounds more in their pockets. It really is a different world.

People on universal credit struggle as their debts increase. Food bank usage is up. Only this month, a *British Medical Journal* study estimated that up to 120,000 deaths in England and Wales could be attributed to the

[Alan Brown]

Tory austerity policy since 2010, and people over 60 are most at risk. This only touches on the world that some of the WASPI women inhabit: having to sell homes and downsize to survive; mental health problems associated with the stress; the humiliation of seeking jobs; marital pressure and break-ups; just living with the daily anger and disappointment at being let down by the state and a Government who refuse to listen.

In a previous SNP Opposition day debate, the then Secretary of State challenged our £8 billion costed proposal to reverse the Pensions Act 2011. He said that we need to look at the longer-term horizon and that it would cost £30 billion to 2025. Well, just a few months later, the Tories trooped through the Lobby following the Budget and voted for £30 billion of tax cuts, including £23.5 billion in corporation tax giveaways. So even if it would cost £30 billion, it could have been found, and it was there in the last Budget. The Budget, which has just been passed, contained a £3.2 billion stamp duty tax giveaway that will only increase house prices, £3.7 billion for Brexit preparations and an additional £7 billion for a national productivity fund. I welcome that money, but it shows that the magic money tree exists and that money can be found whenever the Tories want it.

We have heard the argument that the state pension age equalisation is all because of the bad EU—it is EU rules that have forced it upon us—yet I have not heard one of the mad Brexiteers in the Government come to the Chamber and say, “One of the benefits of leaving the EU is that we can reverse the 2011 Act”. They have never said, “Let’s stick it to the EU, take it on and give these women what they deserve”. It is high time they gave them what they deserve, and it is high time the Government started listening.

4.13 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I agree with the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood). The WASPI campaigners are very passionate and tenacious, and one obviously sympathises with those who, having saved all their lives, feel they were not given adequate notice. Obviously there is a legitimate grievance there, but the point is that, as parliamentarians, if we decide to go through a Division Lobby and vote for something—to join a cause, to jump on its bandwagon—we must have a credible, funded policy to stand behind, otherwise we are selling snake oil. Once again, we have it from the SNP. It stills says we can use the national insurance surplus. I will read out a few more written answers about the ability to use the surplus, which is their policy for saving the WASPI women.

In March 2008, the former Minister Mike O’Brien said:

“Any surplus of NICs over social security benefits in any one year...is not...an extra resource available to spend.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2008; Vol. 472, c. 2605W.]

In February 2009, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer

“what assessment he has made of the merits of using future national insurance fund surpluses to fund an increase in the state pension.”

That was Labour’s policy at the time. The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), then a Minister, replied, on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer,

“Any increase in the basic state pension has a cumulative impact on Government spending going forward. The Government consider the short-term use of the surplus on the national insurance fund in this way to be unsustainable in the long term.”—[*Official Report*, 10 February 2009; Vol. 487, c. 1852W.]

That is not least because it has been in deficit and it is cyclical. I think that any of us who claim to support the WASPI women must say which line of taxation, or which line of expenditure, in the Red Book we are prepared to use to pay for this.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I am afraid that the position of the Scottish National party is so obviously partisan and unaffordable that it does the WASPI campaign no favours, but for all that, there are women in my constituency who were not notified and who are clearly experiencing hardship. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be far more constructive to consider sensible, affordable measures, such as the early draw-down of bus passes, which could help to address the genuine need that exists?

**James Cartlidge**: Of course there are measures that we can consider. My point is that unless we can identify specific lines of tax or expenditure to pay for them, the money will simply be borrowed and paid back by future generations.

**Mhairi Black**: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Cartlidge**: I should be delighted.

**Mhairi Black**: I have heard a lot about how no one is coming to us with a plan for what we can do. As I said earlier, we came up with a plan, and we think we can argue for it. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with it, he should come up with a plan himself. There have been umpteen debates, and we have been waiting for months—years—for the Government to come forward with some kind of proposal, because the 2011 proposal clearly is not good enough.

**James Cartlidge**: I think the hon. Lady is missing the point. I am not saying that to my WASPI campaigners. I am not full of righteous anger, so high on my high horse that my ears pop, like the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). If we are to go out on a limb to that degree, we must have a credible policy. We must be able to say, “This is how we are going to pay for it.”

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

**James Cartlidge**: I do not think that I should give way again, but I will, because the hon. Gentleman was very generous to me. However, others wish to speak, so I shall wind up my speech immediately afterwards.

**Ian Blackford**: We have tabled a very straightforward motion that asks the Government to introduce mitigation measures. The hon. Gentleman has asked for costed proposals, but we gave him one last year in the Landman report, on deferring the increase in women’s pensionable age. It would have cost £8 billion. That is one option. We have done our work; the Government have not done theirs.

**James Cartledge:** I gave way to that intervention, so I shall now wind up my speech, because others wish to speak.

Given that £8 billion is a huge amount of money, it is necessary to identify a specific area of taxation or expenditure—other budgets, as an Opposition Member has said. Until people are prepared to do that, we cannot say that a policy is available to fix this. We are just jumping on a bandwagon.

4.17 pm

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): I am grateful to the SNP for securing this important Opposition day debate, and appreciate the opportunity to speak in it. Like every other Member, I have been contacted by numerous WASPI women in my constituency. We all know how much of an impact this has had, and we all know just how upset, frustrated and deeply angry many WASPI women feel.

Before I go on to ask the Government for transition payments, let me point out that we are all culpable. One of the things that I have found so interesting while sitting here listening to all the different arguments is the element of amnesia. Every political party that is represented in the Chamber now is culpable because of the WASPI issues: the Conservatives, the Labour party and possibly, it appears, even the SNP. I do not know that for sure, because I am not a Scottish MP or a Scottish constituent, but I do know that, during the passage of what became the 1995 Pensions Act, the Tories did not tell people what was happening right at the beginning. In 1999 and then in 2001, 2002 and 2003, Labour did not engage in the mass communication that would have warned the women of what was coming—and I hold my hands up as a member of the coalition Government. I do not think that we gave enough information in 2011, when we changed the retirement ages. So the first thing I want to say, despite all the *Sturm und Drang* in the Chamber, is that I think we have let WASPI women down. End of.

Secondly, I feel that the Government should give serious consideration to finding some transitional money. As a number of Members have pointed out, many of these women, particularly those who are in menial and artisan jobs, will not be in the same physical shape in their early sixties as someone who has not done a backbreaking job for 40 or 45 years. I do believe that the Minister and the Government understand the strength of feeling, the passion, the anger and the exceptional frustration that so many WASPI women feel.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is totally unfair that these women are not paid their pension when they have a full contribution record, and that instead they are being made to work beyond a time when they are able or are forced to rely on insecure benefits that are too low?

**Stephen Lloyd:** That is an important point about the many years of contributions and of back-breaking jobs.

I return to the fact that we are all culpable; we know that in this Chamber—Conservative, Labour, coalition and, according to the Conservatives and Labour, the

SNP as well. I do not say—because I would be lying to my constituents—that we are going to cancel the new retirement age and take it back to 60; anyone who says that knows they are telling whoppers, and that that is not going to happen.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

**Stephen Lloyd:** I am going to continue.

If there are Members who honestly say that to their constituents—well, I am not going to cast any slurs on anyone in the Chamber. This is having a shocking impact in some parts of the country and on many WASPI women and I believe that the Government have a duty to find some additional money to assist with the transition period. That is the right and the honourable thing to do, and I believe that the Government must find that money. If they do, a lot of WASPI women will, possibly through gritted teeth, accept that transition money and move on with this challenging age change. Without that, however, the anger and the sense of justifiable unfairness will increase, which will leave a real scar for a heck of a lot of women born in the 1950s who have contributed not just to the greatness of our nation, but through the children, grandchildren and families that have made our country what it is today.

I urge the Minister to go to the Chancellor and ask him to find an element of transition money that will at least allow the WASPI women to have the funds, not just to make up for losing the six years, but to cover the money that this has cost so many. I urge the Minister to find a way; find some transition money, make a difference, and do it now.

4.23 pm

**Mr Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): This is an important cause that affects thousands of women on the Isle of Wight, and I have had the pleasure of meeting my WASPI representatives on several occasions. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his words on the issue; he knows I hold him in high regard. The Government have done good work on pensions and in many other areas that have improved the lives of pensioners.

My hon. Friend talked about the importance of fairness. In justification of the WASPI women, they would say that the current system is not fair to them, and it is difficult to argue against that point. I have heard many stories of hardship from WASPI women on the Island, many of whom found out at a very late stage of the day that their pensions would be extremely negatively affected. These are not spendthrift people; they are people who have either raised families or worked hard and paid into the system over many years. It pains me to read stories of hardship from them.

My concern for the Government is that a pensions Bill might force this issue, and I believe that, on the grounds of fairness and common sense, moving in some way to rectify this issue now would be better than being forced to do so later. So if there is a way of putting in place transition payments or a mechanism can be found to alleviate some of the worst problems faced by the WASPI women, who are an admirable cause, the Government would get my full support. I know my hon. Friend the Minister cares about this issue very much.

**Jim McMahon:** Given the likelihood that the Government will eventually have to change their position, would it not make sense for a good Government to ensure that financial provision was being made for that eventuality now?

**Mr Seely:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am making that point as well. Clearly, voting either way is not going to change things today, but I hope that the Government will consider this matter in the light of any pensions Bill that is introduced later.

4.25 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): We recently heard from the Chancellor about how he had buckled under the immense lobbying pressure of his 13 Scottish Tory colleagues. That pressure supposedly made all the difference to his scrapping VAT payments for Scotland's police and fire services. Perhaps the half-baked baker's dozen could have another word in his ear to prove that they understand this situation and that they care about the WASPI women and are seeking to achieve justice for them. If the UK Government make no changes, this will simply show that the Scottish Tories are not as influential as they are made out to be, or that they simply do not care about the plight of the WASPI women. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) spoke as though he truly understood the problem, but will he follow us through the Lobby, or was it all just empty rhetoric?

Can you imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, what would happen if MPs born in the 1950s were not made aware of major changes to their pensions that resulted in their not receiving them until years later? If we debated that—and we would—the House would be full to the gunnels. MPs would be filling every single seat, and the steps in between. How quickly would this House find a political solution to that problem? How quick are we to vote ourselves a pay rise? That is the benchmark that the Government should be judged by. On behalf of the 5,700 WASPI women of Inverclyde, I want to tell the UK Government that we will keep on bringing these debates to the House, that we will continue to raise the issue in the press and that we will not go away until there has been a resolution to the plight of those affected by these pension changes.

The momentum of the WASPI campaign has not weakened. Next week, my office will host a meeting of the Inverclyde WASPI group as it maintains its work on attracting new volunteers and making sure that the affected women have access to advice and support. The campaign has already raised more than £100,000 to fund an initial legal campaign, and the Minister must surely be aware it is now too well organised and well funded for him to continue dismissing its concerns. According to the campaign, 196 Members have committed themselves to assisting it. This should be seen as a signal that the UK Government need to begin a dialogue with the WASPI women and that they have to start that dialogue now. The women are being very reasonable in asking for this opportunity. There may be many small steps along the way to achieving a solution, but the UK Government should see sense and take this first step willingly, rather than being dragged along by the undeniable force of public pressure. It is not too late for this

Government to do the decent thing and make amends for this ill-advised, poorly administered and damaging policy.

4.28 pm

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in the debate on this important issue on behalf of the many WASPI women of Chelmsford who have been to visit me, especially the lovely Cheryl Lucas, who speaks with great calm and compassion on the issue. I have deep respect for them and for the situation they find themselves in. Many of these women have worked for many years and paid their taxes and national insurance contributions. They have told me how they had made plans based on the expectation that they would retire on a certain date, only for that date to be changed. Some of them genuinely feel that they were not consulted or made aware of the change of date. Others had retired early in anticipation—

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is putting her case very well. Is this not why it is such an insult to suggest to older women that things will be fine if they go out and get an apprenticeship?

**Vicky Ford:** Let me carry on with my point, because I would dearly love to help the WASPI women in my constituency who find themselves in this situation.

I look at the statistics, and as a mathematician, I remember looking at life expectancy a few years ago. My mother is 30 years older than I am, and my daughter is 30 years younger than I am. Of my mother's age group—those born in 1937—6% will live to 100. For my age group, 16% will live to 100. In my daughter's age group, it is 26%. We are all living longer, and we all therefore need to work longer. That is why successive Labour and Conservative Governments have been right to take measures to change the pension age.

I have thought about what more we could do to help the women who have been affected. If we give them additional financial or tax benefits, what then do I say to women like me who were born in the 1960s? Why should a woman born in 1959 get an additional benefit, but not the woman born in 1960? I have championed equality all my life, so what do I say to the men when the women get an additional benefit? What do I say to my daughter's generation, who are struggling with student debt and struggling to get on the housing ladder? They can see that they may never have anything like the workplace pensions that we have had.

The jobs that the WASPI women have been doing in the past may often not be jobs that they want to continue doing into their 60s and may not suit them, which is why it is so important that we champion opportunities for some of our older workers—people in their 50s, like myself, and people in their 60s. We should go out and tell employers that these women are fantastic and can really add value. For those who have genuine problems, we must be faster in getting support to them. I was contacted by a WASPI woman just this week who has cancer and needs support, so we need to be quicker. I understand why the Government cannot write a blank cheque, but please let us find some support.

4.31 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford).

The WASPI situation is a stain on this country. Were it not for the decisions made by others, these women would perhaps never have thought of turning to politics or of organising, lobbying, shouting and screaming. People such as Ali Wallis and Pat Milligan from East Lothian are organising and seeking justice for the WASPI women. Some 6,000 women in my constituency are being organised and assisted to follow the four-stage process not to seek their pension, but to seek a maladministration review of how information was not given to them. They meet in my constituency office to plan how to identify the other affected women in the area, and I must pay tribute to my predecessor George Kerevan, who aided and assisted the WASPI women so eloquently.

I must point out that the WASPI campaign's aim is not the equalisation of pension ages; it is about the transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s. The campaign recognises the longevity of our population today. The campaign is about the transitional provisions. In March 2016, the Work and Pensions Committee concluded that the communication "has been too little too late for many women, especially given increases in the state pension age have been accelerated at relatively short notice. Many thousands of women justifiably feel aggrieved." Among the 6,000 affected women in East Lothian, those aged between 60 and 62 will see their household incomes fall and income poverty will increase due to the changes. Women who were born in the '50s have paid so much into our system, and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, which should be extended to all those nearing pension age or receiving a state pension. Perhaps the Government should take this opportunity to write to the women to set out the situation. If the Government are unable to offer any financial compensation, they should at least point out the maladministration steps that could be taken so that the matter can be investigated.

We stand up in this place for the people who struggle to have a voice. The WASPI women do not have that struggle, but they seem to struggle getting the Government to listen to them. We must honour the women who have contributed so much to our society, listen to what they are asking for and give them the respect that they so rightly deserve.

4.34 pm

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): I welcome this debate—*[Interruption.]* Excuse me. I would have welcomed the opportunity to put far more points on the record had the leader of the SNP not taken almost 40 minutes with his opening remarks. This is the first debate in this Chamber—*[Interruption.]* SNP Members may want to hear what I have to say.

This is the first debate in this Chamber in which I have been able to articulate the views of WASPI women in Moray, and I would have appreciated a little more than three minutes. Our previous Westminster Hall debate was secured by the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) in early July, less than a month after I was elected to this place. I had not made a maiden speech and, again, there was a very restrictive time limit. Having previously met Moray WASPI women, I told them that I would not contribute to that debate, and they understood, yet the SNP put out a press release criticising me for it. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) said:

"Douglas Ross must do the right thing for these women", despite these women believing that I was doing the right thing for them.

The SNP press release led to comments on social media calling me an "effing snake," a "little twerp" and a "disgrace to humanity." In direct response, another message said:

"I think Guy Fawkes had a good idea."

The SNP has done a lot on this issue, but I agree with the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) that, despite the wording of the motion, the words from the SNP today do not try to encourage more people to support the motion.

I support the 6,400 women in Moray who are affected by this issue. They all agree on the need to equalise the state pension age, but the biggest issue for me and for them is the lack of communication from Governments of all parties. It is because of that lack of communication that I signed the pledge before the election, and I support the pledge now.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) made a valid point about 53% of women relying on the state pension, compared with a far smaller proportion of men.

**Tim Loughton:** I offer my hon. Friend some refuelling, because the SNP would benefit from listening to his wise words. Just because we are from a different party, it does not mean that our commitment to the cause is any less. Does he agree that one suggestion that would show willing—it came up in the Budget for other generations—is for the WASPI women at least to be given back their bus passes? That would help them, and it would be a start to showing our recognition that there is a problem we need to address.

**Douglas Ross:** I agree with a lot of what my hon. Friend says, both now and in previous debates on this issue.

More can be done. There is a lot we can discuss and debate, and I have put myself forward to be a member of the all-party parliamentary group on state pension inequality for women. I signed a pledge before the election, and SNP Members have criticised me every day since I have been elected for not honouring that pledge.

I return to the earlier remarks by SNP Members and by the hon. Member for East Antrim. People can be convinced not by shouting them down every time but by trying to get them to go along with us.

**Chris Stephens:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Douglas Ross:** I am just finishing.

A constituent contacted me after the last efforts by the SNP. She said, "I just wanted to say I am disappointed at the media response to your support of WASPI in Moray. I do hope your support for us continues and we don't become victims in the backlash." I believe WASPI women are already victims—victims of decisions in this Parliament by both sides—and, because they are already victims, I say in the calmest possible way to the SNP that, despite the actions of SNP Members in this debate, I believe the wording of their motion is sensible. If the House divides tonight, I will be joining them to support their motion.

4.38 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross). In my short contribution, I intend to furnish the House with a few examples of the 5,500 women from Airdrie and Shotts who have seen their state pension entitlement cut at short notice. If the Government will not listen to Members on both sides of the House, perhaps they might listen to our constituents and their taxpayers.

My first constituent wishes to remain anonymous. She worked for 43 years and has never been out of work. By the end of 2013 she was exhausted from her work and decided to retire. She knew that she had not yet reached her increased retirement age of 62, but she and her husband calculated their finances and felt that she could and should retire at that time. So she handed in her three months' notice and it was not until a financial adviser, provided by her employer, visited her home that she found out she could not retire until she was 65. By that time, someone else had been offered her job and she just had to make do, all because of the lack of notice.

The next case is that of Christine Rennie from Airdrie. All her working life she had expected to retire at 60, in 2015, but she was given no notice that that was to be extended until 2021. Mrs Rennie has Crohn's disease, which is managed by injections into her stomach. The Crohn's reacts to cold weather, and part of her job as a classroom assistant is playground duty—it does not take me to explain the issues at stake there. Like so many other women in this era, she gave up work to bring up her family and returned to part-time work, with no access to a private pension. She will rely financially on her state pension to retire and she needs it now.

Finally, Ellen Connelly from Airdrie was due to retire aged 60 in 2014, but will now have to wait until 2020, when she turns 66. Highlighting the communications problems once again, Mrs Connelly says she only found out about the state pension age rise via the GMB union magazine. Had she been given proper notice, she would have had the time to find a new job, rather than having to work as a nursing ancillary until she is 66. A lack of notice makes it almost impossible for her to do anything other than continue in that demanding role.

The few cases I have highlighted will not even be the worst examples in my constituency, never mind the rest of the country. They are not the worst we have heard today; they are just a random example from the dozens who have contacted me and will doubtless have contacted others. Every one of these women has had their life turned upside down as a result of the incompetence and intransigence of successive UK Governments.

In conclusion, we all have ladies in our constituencies born in the 1950s who have been impacted by the changes to the state pension age, but there is one thing that does separate us today. Later, some of us will recognise, respect and represent these ladies, and we will be separated from those who will chose to try to ignore them once again. I know where I will be, and that will be in the Lobby backing my WASPI women.

4.41 pm

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. As time is short, I will focus on a few key issues. I cannot support the motion for a few

crucial reasons, the first of which is that the SNP has not clarified its own domestic position adequately to the House. We have heard that there have been many debates on the issue, and the Minister has clarified that there are powers available in the Scotland Act 2016, passed by this House, so I ask SNP Members to consider why the SNP has not addressed this itself in Scotland. Is it simply because it faces declining popularity in Scotland, as reflected in our having more Scottish Conservative MPs?

We all have met WASPI women in our constituencies, and I have spoken to women who have been affected. I am very much aware that these women have been working hard since they were 14 or 15 and have often borne the brunt of caring responsibilities. They have brought up families, and they definitely feel a sense of injustice.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Surely this is about justice, about doing the right thing for WASPI women and about Conservatives joining Opposition Members on the issue. The 31 Conservatives who claim to be supporting the WASPI women—and rightfully so—should join us in the Lobby. Let us have some justice and some proper transitional arrangements.

**Rachel Maclean:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but the basis of the claim in the motion is that nothing has been done, and that is simply not the case. This Government have already allocated more than £1 billion to help women. We have heard this morning from the First Secretary of State that the pension age will be equalised by next year. Although I accept that there are women who feel a sense of injustice, this motion is not the way to deal with it. Let us instead look at what the Government have done to improve the lives of older people up and down this country, including in Scotland.

The investment in the NHS has meant that we have seen people receiving better healthcare, enabling them to live fuller active lives, which means participating in the workforce for longer. I was surprised to hear that it might be an insult for a woman aged 65 to be offered an apprenticeship. I know women of 65 who find that a great opportunity—why write off women just because they are 65? The idea does not apply to all women—no one is saying it does—but research shows that when women take up such opportunities at the age of 65, they report increased satisfaction. We all know that participating in the workforce is one of the best ways to improve mental health and a whole range of other outcomes. I reject the suggestion that it is insulting. Government Members like to think about how we can create more opportunities for our people to participate and live fuller lives, at all stages of their lives. It is incumbent on Members from all parties to recognise that and support it.

We need to look into some of the statistics that Opposition Members have made claims about. Having read some briefings, I do not recognise some of the statistics on maladministration, an issue that the Minister addressed. We need to be honest about the communication programme and the fact that women have been able to plan for their retirement. The crux of my argument is that there is no suggestion that the SNP proposal is costed, and I dispute the figure put forward by its Members.

**Ian Blackford:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Rachel Maclean:** I am sorry but no, I will not. I need to finish.

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is important. I pointed out earlier in the debate that the SNP published the Landman report last year and it was fully costed. The hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) has made an error by saying that our proposal has not been costed. It has been costed precisely and she should recognise that.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** That is not a point of order, it is a point of debate, and it has simply reduced the time available for other people to speak.

**Rachel Maclean:** Research has suggested that it might cost £36 billion to implement the proposals. When I speak to WASPI women in Redditch, how am I supposed to say to them, “Let’s not spend money helping your children and grandchildren” —

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order.

4.46 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): It strikes me that some of us in this House might do well to remember that our retirement might be a decision made by the electorate, who have every right to know when they can retire. They would know, were it not for the way in which the House passed legislation in 1995 and 2011 that changed the state pension age for women born in the ’50s and then failed to communicate that effectively.

The changes to the state pension age affect women such as a constituent of mine who recently came to me to tell me that although she had planned for her retirement for almost 30 years, she now found herself having to do two part-time jobs just to remain solvent. This is a woman who had worked all her life, paid her national insurance and saved for her retirement, and she now works as a cleaner and, as a result, suffers from arthritis. Her life today is very different from the one she anticipated. That she finds herself in this situation is not her fault but is down to the Government’s mismanagement. She was offered voluntary redundancy a couple of years before her anticipated retirement age. She calculated that with two years to go she could use the redundancy money, as well as her savings, to see her through, but she then discovered that she actually had to wait for the best part of a decade to retire. She has now used up her redundancy money, her savings have been whittled away, and she has those two jobs.

My constituent is not alone. Some 6,000 women in my constituency alone have been affected, and almost 3 million women throughout the country have been drawn into this unjust pension trap. Our constituents, in some cases our friends and members of our families, have been pushed into hardship, even poverty, after a lifetime of work. What is most galling is that the women who come to me, like so many others, have no quibble with the need to equalise the pension age with that of men. As has been said already, the issue is how it has been done. A situation has been created in which women born in the 1950s who, for the most part, worked all

their adult lives, paid their national insurance and tax—paying for our education service and national health service—and planned for their retirement are now asked to wait.

During the general election campaign, an elderly person told me that they felt they were being punished by the Conservative Government for growing old. It is difficult not to agree with that today. One thing about this debate that has disappointed me has been the political point scoring between one side of the House and the other. Perhaps it is more important for all of us to rise above that and work to do something to reverse this monstrous injustice; otherwise, the electorate may well offer us all early retirement.

4.49 pm

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I congratulate the Scottish National party on selecting this topic for its Opposition day debate. It is one on which I and many other Members—too many to mention them all—have been working. However, I do wish to mention the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for the sterling work that he has done, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), and my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who have raised this issue time and again and have worked hard to encourage Members from all parts of the House to speak in the debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) that the motion has been carefully crafted to allow anyone to support it—both Government and Opposition Members—and I urge everyone to do so.

If the Government do not take this opportunity to resolve the issue, I remind them that we will have another big debate on this matter in the Chamber on Wednesday 14 December, and I encourage all Members to come along. I say to Ministers: please do not think that you will get off the hook. If this new Session of Parliament has taught us anything, it is that the Government have been prepared, on more than one occasion, to cover their eyes and ears to pretend that suffering is not happening—on universal credit, employment and support allowance, personal independence payments, food banks and now on WASPI. While I have the attention of Ministers for a very brief period, I therefore want to tell them some of the reasons why they should act.

**Mike Hill** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend and neighbour agree that 5,500 women in Hartlepool have been victimised by the Department for Work and Pensions, and the consequences have been devastating? They have been robbed of the happy retirement that they deserve and forced into food banks and the dysfunctional benefits system.

**Grahame Morris:** Absolutely. It is something that affects every Member. Often we bring up issues that affect only the north, only Scotland or only Wales. This time, people in every constituency are affected.

**Jamie Stone:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Grahame Morris:** I really should not give way, because of the time. I do apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but you will admonish me if I give way, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Grahame Morris]

I recently tabled early-day motion 63, which has been signed by 197 Members. A petition was signed by 107,000 people, which led to the granting of a debate. It will take place next week, if it is necessary—if the Minister does not concede the point tonight. May I remind him that the early-day motion has been signed by Members from every party, every nation and every region in the UK?

Every day, I receive completely heartbreaking letters and emails from women who are in dire financial hardship. Many of them have worked and paid national insurance contributions since they were 16. They now find that the deal that they signed with the Government in good faith has effectively been ripped up. We are talking about a contract and a moral obligation on Government. An unnecessary situation has been created, with a generation of women relying on food banks, selling their homes and being forced to rely on the benefits system. It is degrading, completely unfair and unnecessary.

The failings by consecutive Governments have forced these women, many of whom I have known for years because I live in the constituency that I represent, into poverty and forced them to rely on support from friends and relatives. I am totally convinced of the sincerity of their claim that they knew nothing about the increase in pension age because of the lack of notification. I therefore urge the Government immediately to acknowledge their error, provide all those affected with some level of compensation, and provide those worst affected—those who are waiting six years longer than they had planned before they receive their pension—with some support through a bridging pension. I thank the WASPI women for their support in raising this issue.

4.54 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Many of the WASPI women watching this debate may feel disappointed that instead of trying to build some consensus, we have had finger pointing, Pontius Pilate-style hand washing and rancour. It is important to note that this is not a party political issue for many women, and certainly not for those I have spoken to. It is a personal issue that has affected their day-to-day lives, so they want Parliament's collective attention. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) has been an exception today, as he was very honest in accepting that all Administrations have played a part in this situation.

We will support the motion for a number of reasons. The first is that it is quite clear—even from successive Governments' own admissions and from the actions of the Department for Work and Pensions—that people were not given adequate notice of the change. The Pensions Commission said that there should be about 15 years' advance warning for such changes, but some people had less than five.

**Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): There are 4,000 WASPI women in East Renfrewshire. None of those whom I have met have an issue with their state pension age going up; they simply feel that they were not given enough notice. Is there not a broader question about how the Government communicate with individuals who face serious consequences and life changes as a result of this policy? We need to look at the communication, not just at pensions.

**Sammy Wilson:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Even DWP research found that, especially in the lower income groups, two thirds of women were not even aware of the changes. The very fact that the practice was changed to writing to people individually after 2011 indicates that the DWP recognised that newspaper adverts and leaflets were not sufficient.

The second reason why we support the motion is that these changes have hurt people in the lower income brackets. Look at the hardship that has been caused. Research shows that the impact on people with lower incomes is five times the impact on people with higher incomes. There is an issue not only of communication but of fairness, and that has to be dealt with. Poverty among 60 to 64-year-olds has already gone up by 6.2% as a result of the impact of the changes.

We support the motion even though it has been said that it is not specific. At this stage, it is probably right that it is not specific, because a range of remedies could be introduced to deal with the issue. I accept that not all those remedies will please people—for some, no remedies will. I want to be responsible, and I understand that we cannot simply rewrite pensions history and say, "Let's undo all that has been done." It is too costly. But there are a range of remedies, and the motion gives the Government the opportunity to come back with ideas within the financial restraints that they face at present. Those ideas can be knocked around and debated, and we can see what impact they would have and whether they target the people who are hit most badly. But at least let us have some recognition that there is a problem caused by bad communication, and that that problem hits certain groups of people, especially those on low incomes who are coming to the end of their working lives. Let us find a way to deal with it.

4.58 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I have no wish to be disrespectful to anybody in the House, but I have to say that some of the comments I have heard from the Government side of the Chamber have been unmitigated piles of mince.

The injustice that has been visited on women born in the 1950s is widely accepted by most people, except the Conservatives, who continue either to tell those women that they can seek apprenticeships—we heard that again today, justified by the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), who is not in the slightest bit embarrassed by her comments—or draw down their early bus passes. You could not make this up. Apparently, the message to WASPI women suffering hardship right now is, "Don't worry about it. Do you know what? You're going to live longer and you might even get a telegram from the Queen, so that's alright."

**Jamie Stone:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Patricia Gibson:** No, thank you.

The message is, "Don't worry if you're short of money now. Don't worry if you can't pay the rent. One day, if you hang on long enough, the Queen might send you a wee card."

No one doubts that people are living longer. No one doubts that we need to have pension equalisation. That is not the issue at hand today; the issue at hand is the

poverty these women are living in because this Government did not give them sufficient notice to make alternative plans.

**Jamie Stone:** Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Patricia Gibson:** No, thank you.

That is what today's debate is about, so Members should not come to the Chamber and talk about apprenticeships and about how we are all living longer. That is nothing to do with what this debate is about.

To add insult to injury, new freedom of information figures reveal that the DWP has received thousands of complaints relating to the WASPI campaign, yet only six investigations have been seen through to completion. Despite the so-called dedicated complaints team, thousands of women have been let down and robbed of a pension, with questions unanswered.

What about the Prime Minister's vow to tackle "burning injustice"? I continue to wait for evidence of that. What about the Tory MPs from Scotland who pledged their support to the WASPI women but who will stand up today, give those women tea and sympathy and then go on to abstain in the vote? They are a disgrace. They should hang their heads in shame.

It is time that this burning injustice was addressed. It is time for the Government to stop giving these women a deaf ear. They should take off their brass neck and do the right thing. It is time to give WASPI women the justice they deserve.

5.1 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): I thought I would never hear the likes of it, but I have: the idea that the solution is for people to draw down their bus pass; or that, somehow, it is not offensive—I am looking at the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean)—to offer a 65-year-old woman an apprenticeship. That is completely out of touch with this nation, and I am offended on behalf of these women.

I want to challenge the premise that everyone is living longer. Are the poorest in this nation living longer? I would also challenge the premise that, just because someone lives longer, they should work longer and not actually live longer after their working life.

Five thousand women in my constituency are affected by this pension age increase and by the woeful and inadequate notice they received of the changes. I met those women during the general election campaign, as other Members met women in their constituencies, and they made a massive impression on me.

There are now 190 Members in this House who said they would support the WASPI women. I hope that that was not just an election gimmick—I am looking at the Scottish Conservatives. Anybody who has supported these women needs to do that now. They have to keep their contract with those women in deeds and not just words. *[Interruption.]* I see that the Whip has just done the rounds of the Tories, but I hope that that was not to put pressure on them. They should come into the Lobby with us.

My own mam was born in 1953 and started work at the age of 13. She worked for 47 years and thought she would get her pension at the age of 61; actually, she will get it at the age of 65 and two months. To this day, she

still has not received any notification from the Department for Work and Pensions, as is the case for thousands of other women.

I can guarantee this: if these women owed the state any money—if there was any unpaid tax from these women or if there was any bill they had not paid—the Government would be on their backs. The Government would be tenacious in the recovery of that debt, and the communication would be thick and fast.

To witness the disappointment of these women is heartbreaking. Women who could not have worked any harder all their life are being made into dependents at an older age. How degrading is that? The exponential increase in ESA claimants is telling.

**Jamie Stone:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Laura Pidcock:** I am sorry, but there is not time.

In our universal credit debate, I heard the argument, which I reject, that the system of monthly payments teaches people lessons. But if we apply the premise from that debate—the one about expectations and notification—the Government have absolutely failed. For these women, who have not had adequate time to prepare, who have had inadequate correspondence from the DWP and who are at no fault at all, the right thing to do is to compensate them and to have a bridging pension.

The 1950s women will not give up. They will not go away and they will not forgive this Government if their demands are not met. They do not need apprenticeships or platitudes, but they need pension justice now. Let us have a vote and let us see whose side people are really on.

5.4 pm

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

I only arrived in this House in June this year and on 21 November I led my first Westminster Hall debate, on the state pension age. I was grateful to the many Opposition Members who attended and spoke up for women in their area and across the country. I was even more grateful to the many WASPI women who turned up in Westminster Hall that day to hear the people who spoke. Sadly, no Government Back Bencher turned up to speak, apart from in interventions.

We cannot beat Father Time; even Big Ben suffers from old age. One day, it will be our turn to retire. As we look back, will we wonder, "If only I had listened. If only I had cared. If only I could turn back time"? If Members cannot listen to me, they should listen to the WASPI women. Members will all have had plenty of letters, emails and Twitter and Facebook messages from their constituents—their own voters; the people who sent them here to listen to and speak up for them.

I am committed to fighting for a better deal for the WASPI women not just in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, but across the whole of the UK. It is time to listen; it is time to care—the WASPI women's time has come.

5.5 pm

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I honestly do not think that Scotland has ever been talked about as much in the Chamber as in this debate,

[Mhairi Black]

but it is worth reminding everybody that this is a UK-wide problem created by consecutive UK Governments.

I know that it is the job of the person winding up to sum up the debate, but I have been trying to figure out a way to do that without swearing. I will start with the Scottish Conservatives. My hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) eloquently said that they have a brass neck. I am happy to supply the Brasso for that brass neck—honest to God, how shiny it is! The amount of rubbish spoken in the Chamber today by those Members is appalling.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) if he feels that any of my comments in a press release drew unjust criticism to him. However, my criticism is legitimate. He expresses annoyance at not being listened to, but this is the 12th time that we have had to debate this matter since I was elected. If any disrespect is being shown, it is by the Conservatives, who have refused to listen time and again.

**Douglas Ross:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She would have listened to my speech, in which I said that it was not just me who was criticising the attitude of the SNP, but WASPI women in Moray, who wrote to me to express concern about the attitude of SNP Members, who do not try to get support across the aisle, but simply use the issue to score political points. That will not achieve the right result for the WASPI women.

**Mhairi Black:** Right, I will go over a few points again, just to get this across. In 1995, the then Government did not write to anybody to let them know that they would have extra years added on to their pension—[*Interruption.*] Hold on, I'm getting there. In 2011, this Government came along and said, "Right, see that timetable? We're going to make it a lot quicker and much more intense." Bear in mind that no letters were sent out until 14 years after the changes were implemented. Right? Let's go with that. Conservative Governments—and, to be fair, consecutive Labour Governments—did not pick up on this, so here we are now.

Twelve times we have debated this issue since I was elected and on every single occasion, the Government have abstained. I would like the hon. Member for Moray to tell me what he thinks I should have done that I have not done yet. Can he?

**Douglas Ross:** If the hon. Lady wants me to tell her what she should do that she has not done yet, it is to answer my intervention from earlier.

**Mhairi Black:** Oh, the hon. Gentleman is a pleasure to talk to, but I will move on.

The motion was deliberately written to make sure that it was not party political—[*Laughter.*] I am loving the laughter from Conservative Members. If they want to tell me what is funny, I would suggest an intervention.

**Ross Thomson:** I thank the hon. Lady very much for taking an intervention. She says the motion was written so that it was not party political. I am afraid that the diatribe we have heard from SNP Members has been nothing but narrow, party political point scoring that

has achieved nothing for WASPI and nothing for those affected, and is only in the interests of the SNP. The women affected deserve better.

**Mhairi Black:** The motion says:

"That this House calls on the Government to improve transitional arrangements for women born on or after 6 April 1951 who have been adversely affected by the acceleration of the increase to the state pension age."

What part of that can the hon. Gentleman not get on board with?

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mhairi Black:** No, I am moving on. It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) to talk about the attitude of SNP Members considering some of the guff that has been coming from the Conservatives, especially in the last couple of weeks.

The point is that even when we come to the House with a non-political motion—[*Interruption.*] I suggest you listen as well. We have had more excuses and more of the same; everybody has covered that. Let us remember that these women are guilty of nothing other than when they were born. Only women are getting affected by this. We keep hearing about equalisation, but it is a strange definition of equality when only women get targeted and are told that they are going to be left destitute.

I am coming to the end of my remarks. We are told that these women can get apprenticeships. If anybody cannot see the problem with suggesting that 65-year-olds start a new career and a new pension pot, I am sorry, but I do not know who they are talking to. To be fair to the Minister, that is an opportunity, if people want it, but they should not be forced into it. A better idea is to try paying them their pension.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mhairi Black:** No, I will not. Sit down!

In conclusion, I have to express some frustration at the Labour party. I am being very gentle on it, because I appreciate that we are all on board with this. My main difference with Labour Members is on the constitutional question, and that is fair enough. Three years ago we were told that we were better together, on the strong shoulders of the United Kingdom. We were told, "Vote no to save your pension." It has been three years; if we are better together, prove it.

5.11 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Caroline Dinenage):** I start by thanking everyone who has contributed to today's debate on this important issue. Members on both sides of the House have made passionate and heartfelt speeches and interventions.

A welfare and pensions system is successful only as long as it is sustainable, and as the population balance shifts from working-age pension contributors to those aged over 65, an increase in the state pension age is necessary for the welfare of all. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) pointed out, virtually every

party in the House has either taken the opportunity to raise it, or not taken the opportunity to do something about it.

**Jamie Stone:** To support my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), does the Minister agree that the failure to address the issue—for whatever reason, and by whatever party—reflects badly on this Parliament in general at a time when we could do with a much higher standing in public esteem?

**Caroline Dinéage:** We have taken forward transitional arrangements. It is insulting for Members from parties that have played their part in getting us to where we are today somehow to wash their hands of the matter. I will go on to make a few points, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

Those who are able to work should support those who are not, confident in the expectation of similar support when they reach retirement. Today's workers provide the support for today's pensioners, and that is why it is so important that we have the right balance of the contributions that are paid in at present with the pensions that are being withdrawn, and that we adjust pension ages to maintain that balance. Women who retire today can still expect to receive the state pension for 24 and a half years, on average—almost three years longer than men.

As was outlined by the Pensions Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), the Department for Work and Pensions has communicated the timetable for changes to the state pension age since they were first set in train 22 years ago. As my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) pointed out, in response to concerns raised during debates on the Pensions Act 2011 in both Houses, we introduced the £1.1 billion concession that has been mentioned, which staggered the changes and ensured that no one would wait more than 18 months for their pensions, compared with under the previous timetable.

Any further concession would cost significantly more. It would involve asking people of working age—more specifically, today's younger people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) mentioned—to pay even more for it. Those outcomes simply cannot be justified.

**Ian Blackford:** Will the Minister give way?

**Caroline Dinéage:** I am not going to give way to the right hon. Gentleman. He made criticisms in relation to the Budget and the Chancellor, but he went on to speak for a considerable time today, taking more than 40 minutes for himself and depriving Back Benchers of the chance to have their say. I will make some progress—*[Interruption.]* I want to address some of the issues that have been raised by SNP Members, so if the right hon. Gentleman would like to listen, I will do so.

As has previously been stated—my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) pointed this out—if the Scottish National party disagrees with any of the UK Government's welfare reforms, it has the power to do something about it in Scotland.

The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has mentioned on several occasions that the Scottish National party's Westminster parliamentary group published a report by Landman

Economics, which modelled—*[Interruption.]* I thought he would be keen to listen to this. The report modelled the impact of a number of options for compensating women affected by the 2011 Act. Of these, the Scottish National party's preferred option was to abandon that Act entirely, returning us to the timetable under the Pensions Act 1995.

The SNP-commissioned report put the cost of this option at £7.9 billion for the period between 2016-17 to 2020-21. As it stands, that is simply unaffordable, but it has the double misfortune of also being wrong. The Landman report significantly underestimates the full costs of returning to the 1995 Act's timetable. The Government estimate that the cost over that period would be about £14 billion—nearly double—and that figure includes the impact of lost revenue from tax and national insurance, which the Landman report does not fully take into account.

What is worse is that the SNP's position applies the costs only to the five-year window between 2016-17 and 2020-21. The costs beyond this horizon are simply not included in the option put forward. If the changes we are implementing did not happen, the actual costs to working-age people would be more than £30 billion over an extended period, which is equivalent to over £1,100 per household. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman would like to justify that to his constituents.

The Scottish National party has also suggested using the national insurance fund to pay for the cost of scrapping the Pensions Act 2011. However, that is not the intended use of the fund, and it is worth reiterating that today's national insurance contributions fund today's pensions, with an excess of only two months' outgoing payments at any given time.

The new state pension is actually much more generous for many women, who were historically worse off under the old system. By 2030, over 3 million women stand to gain an average of £550 extra per year as a result of these changes. The acceleration of the increase in the state pension age for both women and men is necessary to ensure the state pension system's sustainability in the light of increasing life expectancy and more pressure on public resources. In fact, by 2035, there will be more than twice as many people aged 100 and over as there are now.

Failure to act in the light of such compelling evidence would be reckless. Given the increasing financial pressure that I have described, we cannot and should not unpick a policy that has been in place for 22 years. It is simply not affordable, especially when we take into account the fact that the average woman reaching state pension age will get a higher state pension income over her lifetime than an average woman reaching state pension age at any earlier point.

It is important to appreciate the modern lived experience of later life in the 21st century, which has altered significantly since the inception of the state pension in the 1940s. Longer life, better health and continued activity in later decades are reshaping the profile and participation of older people in our society. This includes sustaining work and other economic activity as those over 60 continue to learn, earn, contribute and participate.

**Rachel Maclean:** Contrary to the assertion by SNP Members that it is an insult to offer an apprenticeship, does my hon. Friend agree that saying that is actually an insult to women who would like to take up—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. I am sorry, but I think the Minister had finished her speech.

**Caroline Dinenge:** In fact, I do not think that I had quite finished, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I do not think that anybody is suggesting that older women should be forced to take an apprenticeship. No one is even suggesting that they should be cajoled or encouraged to do so, but I find it insulting that SNP and Labour Members seem to be suggesting that women over the age of 60 should be put on the scrapheap and should not be allowed to do what they want. If they want to take an apprenticeship, they should be allowed to do so.

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)** *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

*Question put forthwith,* That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to.*

*Main Question accordingly put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 0.*

#### Division No. 50]

[5.20 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Coffey, Ann
Abrahams, Debbie	Cooper, Julie
Alexander, Heidi	Cooper, Rosie
Ali, Rushanara	Cooper, rh Yvette
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Amesbury, Mike	Cowan, Ronnie
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Coyle, Neil
Ashworth, Jonathan	Crawley, Angela
Austin, Ian	Creagh, Mary
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Creasy, Stella
Bardell, Hannah	Cruddas, Jon
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Cryer, John
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cummins, Judith
Benn, rh Hilary	Cunningham, Alex
Betts, Mr Clive	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Blackford, rh Ian	Dakin, Nic
Blackman, Kirsty	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	David, Wayne
Blomfield, Paul	Davies, Geraint
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Day, Martyn
Brabin, Tracy	De Cordova, Marsha
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	De Piero, Gloria
Brake, rh Tom	Debbonaire, Thangam
Brennan, Kevin	Dent Coad, Emma
Brock, Deidre	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Brown, Alan	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dodds, Anneliese
Bryant, Chris	Dodds, rh Nigel
Buck, Ms Karen	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Burgon, Richard	Doughty, Stephen
Butler, Dawn	Dowd, Peter
Byrne, rh Liam	Drew, Dr David
Cadbury, Ruth	Duffield, Rosie
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Eagle, Ms Angela
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Eagle, Maria
Carden, Dan	Edwards, Jonathan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Efford, Clive
Chapman, Douglas	Elliott, Julie
Charalambous, Bambos	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Cherry, Joanna	Elmore, Chris
Ciwyd, rh Ann	Esterson, Bill
Coaker, Vernon	Evans, Chris

Farrelly, Paul	Little Pengelly, Emma
Farron, Tim	Lloyd, Stephen
Field, rh Frank	Lloyd, Tony
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Fletcher, Colleen	Loughton, Tim
Flint, rh Caroline	Lucas, Caroline
Flynn, Paul	Lucas, Ian C.
Foxcroft, Vicky	Lynch, Holly
Frith, James	Madders, Justin
Gaffney, Hugh	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Gapes, Mike	Mahmood, Shabana
George, Ruth	Malhotra, Seema
Gethins, Stephen	Mann, John
Gill, Preet Kaur	Marsden, Gordon
Girvan, Paul	Martin, Sandy
Glindon, Mary	Maskell, Rachael
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Matheson, Christian
Goodman, Helen	Mc Nally, John
Grant, Peter	McCabe, Steve
Gray, Neil	McCarthy, Kerry
Green, Kate	McDonagh, Siobhain
Greenwood, Lilian	McDonald, Andy
Greenwood, Margaret	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Griffith, Nia	McDonald, Stuart C.
Gwynne, Andrew	McDonnell, rh John
Haigh, Louise	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Hamilton, Fabian	McGinn, Conor
Hanson, rh David	McGovern, Alison
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	McInnes, Liz
Harris, Carolyn	McKinnell, Catherine
Hayes, Helen	McMahon, Jim
Healey, rh John	McMorrin, Anna
Henderson, Gordon	Mearns, Ian
Hendry, Drew	Miliband, rh Edward
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Monaghan, Carol
Hill, Mike	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Hillier, Meg	Moran, Layla
Hobhouse, Wera	Morden, Jessica
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Morris, Grahame
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Murray, Ian
Hoey, Kate	Nandy, Lisa
Hollern, Kate	Newlands, Gavin
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Norris, Alex
Hopkins, Kelvin	O'Hara, Brendan
Hosie, Stewart	Onasanya, Fiona
Howarth, rh Mr George	Onn, Melanie
Huq, Dr Rupa	Onwurah, Chi
Hussain, Imran	Osamor, Kate
Jardine, Christine	Owen, Albert
Jarvis, Dan	Peacock, Stephanie
Johnson, Diana	Pearce, Teresa
Jones, Darren	Pennycook, Matthew
Jones, Gerald	Perkins, Toby
Jones, Graham P.	Phillips, Jess
Jones, Helen	Phillipson, Bridget
Jones, Mr Kevan	Pidcock, Laura
Jones, Sarah	Platt, Jo
Jones, Susan Elan	Pollard, Luke
Khan, Afzal	Pound, Stephen
Killen, Gerard	Powell, Lucy
Kinnock, Stephen	Qureshi, Yasmin
Kyle, Peter	Rashid, Faisal
Laird, Lesley	Rayner, Angela
Lake, Ben	Reed, Mr Steve
Lamb, rh Norman	Rees, Christina
Lavery, Ian	Reeves, Ellie
Law, Chris	Reeves, Rachel
Lee, Ms Karen	Reynolds, Jonathan
Leslie, Mr Chris	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Lewis, Clive	Rodda, Matt
Linden, David	Ross, Douglas

Rowley, Danielle  
 Ruane, Chris  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Eleanor  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Laura  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sweeney, Mr Paul

Swinson, Jo  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Twist, Liz  
 Umunna, Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Walker, Thelma  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitfield, Martin  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Dr Paul  
 Williamson, Chris  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Patricia Gibson and  
 Patrick Grady**

**NOES**

**Tellers for the Noes:**

**Mhairi Black and  
 Mr Alan Campbell**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House calls on the Government to improve transitional arrangements for women born on or after 6 April 1951 who have been adversely affected by the acceleration of the increase to the state pension age.

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have just had an impassioned debate, and a clear and decisive result. This House has determined that the Government should bring in mitigation for the WASPI women. I am seeking your guidance as to what we now need to do to empower the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to come to the Chamber, recognise parliamentary democracy, and put in place the Government's plans to respect the motion that the House has passed.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I think that the most useful thing I can do is read out the written statement made by the Leader of the House on 26 October in which she updated the House on the Government's approach to Opposition day debates. She said:

"Where a motion tabled by an Opposition party has been approved by the House, the relevant Minister will respond to the resolution of the House by making a statement no more than 12 weeks after the debate. This is to allow thoughtful consideration of the points that have been raised, facilitate collective discussion across Government, especially on cross-cutting issues, and to outline any actions that have been taken."—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2017; Vol. 630, c. 12WS.]

I think that it is very clear what the Government will do. The right hon. Gentleman may well wish to question the Leader of the House further tomorrow, during the exchanges on the business statement, about when there might be a response from the Government.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given the amount of time that Divisions on Opposition day motions take, would it be possible to issue Conservative Members with white flags to wave, rather than our having to put up with the inconvenience of a Division?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Well, that is very ingenious but, as the Speaker has said before, it is up to each individual Member to decide which way to vote, or even whether to vote.

## EU Nationals

5.36 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Home Secretary to introduce legislative proposals in this Session of Parliament, in line with the recommendation in paragraph 45 of the Second Report of the Exiting the European Union Committee of Session 2016-17, The Government's negotiating objectives: the rights of UK and EU citizens, HC 1071, that the Government should now make a unilateral decision to safeguard the rights of EU nationals living in the UK.

It is the responsibility of each of us—every parliamentarian—to represent all citizens, regardless of who they voted for. We must also all be aware that our actions in this place have consequences, just as our lack of action has consequences. It is now 525 days—75 weeks on Thursday—since the EU referendum, which delivered crushing uncertainty to our fellow citizens who happen to come from elsewhere in the European Union. We can change that: we can take away the uncertainty that has been so damaging for the past 75 weeks.

Our motion contains a direct quotation from a report from the cross-party Select Committee on Exiting the European Union in stating that we

“should now make a unilateral decision to safeguard the rights of EU nationals living in the UK.”

That is something that this Government should have done months ago, but once again it is up to the Opposition to give them an opportunity to take away the uncertainty and to do the right thing by our fellow citizens. That should apply to EU citizens and to core family members.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman in advance on winning the vote at 7 pm, given that the Government appear to be absenting themselves from democracy in the Chamber. Does he agree that the uncertainty must be cleared up once and for all? Many organisations in my constituency, including the world-class Edinburgh University, require EU nationals in order to remain world-class, and that is why we need to clear this up as soon as possible.

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Gentleman has made a valuable point. I shall say something about universities shortly. The excellence of Edinburgh University is, of course, dwarfed only by that of the University of St Andrews.

I hope that tonight the House will back the ability of EU citizens to remain, and that we will take away that uncertainty. Just as we should be delivering fairness for WASPI women, we should be delivering fairness for EU citizens.

Let us consider the contribution that EU nationals make. Our proposal would benefit not just those in our communities with EU passports, but our entire community. A lot of statistics are bandied about when it comes to our relationship with Europe, so let me give a few examples. There is the £40 billion just to leave the EU—just to keep us standing still—that we will not be able to spend on public services. There are the 80,000 jobs that the Fraser of Allander Institute reckons leaving will cost us in Scotland alone. There is also the £350 million a week that we were promised for the NHS, which we

are yet to see. That statistic came from senior Government members who are now in a position to deliver on the promise.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I have two universities in my constituency, and they often rely on the expertise of EU nationals for some of their courses and technology. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is very important?

**Stephen Gethins:** I absolutely agree, and I will come on that shortly. In fact, it is important, not just for universities but across a range of industries.

To add to the statistics I have just given, I will give some statistics applicable to Scotland. Each EU citizen working in my country contributes £34,500 to GDP, which comes to about £4.5 billion overall. Each EU citizen working in Scotland contributes £10,500 in Government revenue—the taxes we spend on our public services. Frankly, EU citizens are better for the economy than Brexit.

The following is a critical point, which I hope the Minister will touch on when he sums up. Will the Government keep the promise made by Vote Leave—made by senior members of the Government—that

“there will be no change for EU citizens...resident in the UK” and that they

“will be treated no less favourably than they are at present”?

Vote Leave did not tell us much, but it did make promises, and these promises were made by senior members of the Government, who have a responsibility to keep them.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that an EU citizen who came here back in, let us say, 1968, and who had “ILR”—indefinite leave to remain—stamped in their passport but might since have lost their passport, will apparently be required to prove that they have not left the UK for two years since arriving in 1968?

**Stephen Gethins:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about that uncertainty. I have had such cases in my constituency. There are people who have lived here since the 1960s and 1970s and, as far as I am concerned, they have as much right to live here as I do, or as other Members do, but that right has been taken away from them. That is a disgrace to each and every one of us.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab) *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I want to make some progress.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Scaremongering.

**Stephen Gethins:** There is one way to get rid of scaremongering: to vote with us tonight and give EU citizens certainty. This Parliament has the power to put an end to that uncertainty.

Let me talk about some of the key industries. On the NHS, the Conservatives should be ashamed. Anyone who has spent time in hospital recently or had relatives who have done so, will tell of the outstanding care from all staff in the NHS, including EU nationals. Very few of us will not have been treated by an EU national at some point. Yet the British Medical Association reports

that 45% of doctors are considering leaving and 19% have already made arrangements to do so. That is damaging for us all—each and every one of us.

Seasonal workers make an absolutely crucial contribution on our farms. Just a couple of weeks ago I was speaking to a farmer in my constituency who plants broccoli. He told me that it has to be harvested by hand, and that if the number of seasonal workers continues to go down, the harvest cannot be taken in. That uncertainty is being created for industries in my constituency and, I suspect, in rural constituencies across the UK.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): There are not many rural elements to my constituency, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that the same principle applies to construction, where we could also face a lack of skilled workers, holding up the building of more affordable homes, which are urgently needed, including in my constituency?

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point about the construction industry.

The University of St Andrews is a big employer in my constituency, with 22% of its academic staff and 31% of its research staff coming from other EU countries. That is absolutely critical.

I want to touch on the human angle now. It is all very well to talk about statistics and the big impact; that is something that we are all aware of. I have asked colleagues across the House about EU nationals in their constituencies, and I want to give hon. Members some examples. In Glasgow North, for example, Michèle Gordon, a Scot who is originally from Germany, runs the Language Hub, which helps young and old people to learn new language skills. In Rosyth, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), Dace Stutane, a Scot who is originally from Latvia, volunteers in the community garden to cultivate vegetables to give to local children. In St Andrews, Silvia Paracchini, a Scot originally from Italy, works with a team of five other EU nationals on ground-breaking neurogenetics, including vital work on dyslexia. That work will benefit us all. Nanodent in Glenrothes and Edinburgh has Spanish and Greek dentists who are plugging a gap in that vital service. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) is married to a German Scot who has worked in the NHS in Scotland for 32 years. The former Member of the Scottish Parliament, Christian Allard, is a Scot who was originally from France. He set up a fishing business and is now in Aberdeen.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The hon. Gentleman, with his knowledge of the Scottish Parliament, will know that the final wood-finishing work in that building was done by craftsmen from eastern Europe. When I was in another place, in another incarnation, Bovis told me that that work could not have been carried out, but for those craftsmen, because we no longer have those skills in this country.

**Stephen Gethins:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, drawing on his own experience in the Scottish Parliament. That Parliament reflects the modern Scotland, drawing as it does on so many people from across the EU.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I want to take an intervention from the other side of the House now.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman really insinuating that there is a threat in his mind—I believe that it exists only in his mind—that we are somehow going to remove these valuable members of our society from our nation? That is a preposterous suggestion. It is simply fear-mongering.

**Stephen Gethins:** This is outrageous. If this was scaremongering, the Government would be quite happy to remove the uncertainty from EU citizens, but they have not done so. And what about the 100 EU nationals who received Home Office letters telling them that there had been an unfortunate error? Those letters should have told them, “We are sorry. You are welcome to stay here.”

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I want to finish making my points now.

The UK is at a crossroads in relation to the kind of country that we want to see. The first mark of that must be the way in which we treat our fellow citizens. Is the message that is coming out that they are bargaining chips? Or is the message that we should be welcoming them? This is a question of fairness, just as it is for the WASPI women. If the UK Government will not keep the promises that were made by Vote Leave and by senior members of this Administration who are in a position to do something about this, they should devolve this power to the Scottish Parliament and the other devolved Administrations.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** I want to finish now, and I am sorry that some Members have not been able to get in.

The day after the EU referendum, the First Minister of Scotland said:

“I want to take the opportunity this morning to speak directly to citizens of other EU countries living here in Scotland—you remain welcome here, Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued.”

Today, we are asking Parliament to use the powers that we have and, as the Brexit Committee has requested, to remove the uncertainty for EU citizens. We can do this today, right now.

5.49 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Brandon Lewis):** It is good to have the chance to correct some of the inaccurate things that were stated just a few moments ago, and it was interesting to listen to the Scottish National party spokesman make a speech in which he simply decided not to recognise democracy. There was a referendum in this country, a decision was made and this Government will deliver what the people of the United Kingdom voted for, and we will deliver that in a way that gets a good deal for the United Kingdom.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Brandon Lewis:** Not just yet; I want to make some progress.

We are listening to the SNP trying to play catch-up, and I will explain why they are yet again behind the curve on where we are. It is slightly odd and, I suspect, somewhat disconcerting for many people in Scotland today to listen to their representatives fail to represent the very people in Scotland who elected them, because there was not a single mention of any British citizen or Scottish individual who is living and working in the European Union. It is proper to ensure that we do right by them.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I am going to make some progress before taking interventions.

More than 3 million EU citizens currently live in the UK, and the Government have been clear that we value their contribution to our national life, to our economy and to our rich and diverse society. We want them to stay, and there is agreement on that. We want them to stay and we want to deliver that for them.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for giving way. On the contribution of EU nationals, does it not concern him that there is an 89% drop in nurses and midwives coming from Europe and that 11% of UK-born nurses have fallen off the register? If we cannot recruit nurses and midwives, what will that mean for this country's health service?

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have done his homework and will have taken the time to look at the work we are doing on what we do as we leave the EU. The independent experts at the Migration Advisory Committee are doing work to look at what we do post Brexit, but let me be clear that we are still in the EU and still have freedom of movement, which will continue until we leave the EU.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I will just finish answering the first intervention before taking any more.

At the last calculation, this country's net migration figure was some 246,000, and roughly half of them were EU nationals, who continue to come to this country. People see the UK as a country to come to, and rightly so. We should continue to be a country that welcomes people and plays that role.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Minister give way on that?

**Brandon Lewis:** I am going to make some progress, and I will then take some interventions. I am conscious of the limited time available for Back-Bench Members.

The future rights of EU citizens living here is an issue that has an impact on the lives of millions of hard-working people across the country, and it has been the Prime Minister's first priority in the negotiations to ensure that they can carry on living their lives here as before. I therefore welcome the opportunity to outline that further today. The Government have been making

it clear at every opportunity that we want to offer EU citizens living in the UK certainty about their future status as early as possible. We have been clear that no EU citizen currently lawfully in the UK will have to leave when we exit the EU, and hon. Members can play their part by reassuring their constituents of that fact—I am sure that they would not want to mislead anyone any further.

In June, we published a fair and comprehensive offer in respect of the position of EU citizens and their family members in the UK, giving residents who were here before a specified date the opportunity to take UK settled status after completing their qualifying residence period and enabling them to carry on with their lives as before. Family dependants who join a qualifying EU citizen in the UK before the exit date will also be able to apply for UK settled status after five years' continuous residence—irrespective of the specified date. We have committed to provide an application system that is streamlined and user-friendly. Our intention is to develop a system that draws on existing Government data, such as the employment records held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which will for the majority verify their residence as a worker. Our priority is to minimise the burden of documentary evidence required to prove eligibility under the withdrawal agreement.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he agree that every day that passes means another day that EU citizens are living in limbo? I assure him that they are coming to my surgery in big numbers. Every day that passes is important, and the Government need to get on with setting out exactly what settled status means and to design a programme tomorrow.

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Lady should look at what has already been said and at what we have outlined. She should read the Government's offer, which clearly answers her very point. She has a part to play in reassuring her residents, rather than leaving them wondering about things on which they can have fixed answers.

We have already said that there will be a two-year period after exit for people to make an application, and our caseworkers will be exercising discretion in favour of the applicant, where appropriate, to avoid any unnecessary administrative burdens. For those who already hold an EU permanent residence document, there will be a very simple process to exchange it for a settled status document.

**Andy Slaughter:** I can tell the Minister what EU citizens think of his proposals because one in six of my constituents is an EU citizen. They think the proposals are bureaucratic and expensive, and that they will deliver second-class citizen status. He should withdraw the proposals and give EU citizens equal status, as they have now. He should do it unilaterally and he should do it now.

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman will want to go back, check the details of what we have already outlined on how the process will work and update his residents. They do not have to have those concerns, because what he has just outlined is simply inaccurate.

We have also been very clear that we fully expect the EU and its member states to ensure that the rights of UK nationals living across the EU before the specified date are safeguarded in a reciprocal way. Despite not mentioning it so far this afternoon, I would like to think that Members on both sides of the House will want to do the right thing and ensure that British citizens have their rights protected, too. This issue must therefore be resolved as part of the negotiations on our exit from the EU to ensure the fair treatment of UK nationals living in other EU countries.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): We are not convinced of the Government's integrity on this point. Earlier this year, I took a petition to the European Parliament arguing for equal rights for EU citizens living here and for British citizens living in the EU. The petition, which also asks for several other things, has gone through three committees of the European Parliament. I remind the Minister that, ultimately, the European Parliament has the power of veto over the negotiations, which he should bear in mind. Many Members of this House have signed these petitions, which are now going through the EU process.

**Brandon Lewis:** The right hon. Lady makes an interesting contribution, and I therefore hope she will support us in ensuring that all EU citizens here in the UK are aware of exactly what the Government are doing to ensure that they have confidence in being able to stay here.

One million UK nationals have built their lives elsewhere in Europe, and we want to make sure that we get a fair deal both for EU citizens in the UK and for UK nationals in the EU. That is a sensible approach, and it is one we will continue to take in the coming weeks. As I have said, it is notable that we are the party making that point, which I have not heard from Opposition Members in debates on this issue.

We have had detailed and constructive negotiations with the EU on citizens' rights and, as the Prime Minister outlined, we are within touching distance of an agreement. Around two thirds of the issues identified have now been resolved, and we have isolated the key remaining issues to agree. We will be working hard in the coming days and weeks to finalise this chapter of the withdrawal agreement and to deliver our shared objective of providing swift reassurance to EU citizens in the UK and to UK nationals in the EU. For the UK to take unilateral positions at this stage of the negotiations would not be appropriate or responsible.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Minister has sought to criticise my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) for not mentioning UK nationals living in Europe. I know the Minister has met British in Europe, which represents that group, but can he tell us why, if the Government care so much about UK nationals living in Europe, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has refused to meet British in Europe despite countless requests to do so?

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. and learned Lady will appreciate that, as the Minister responsible for this portfolio, I have met and will continue to meet representatives from that group. The fact remains that there needs to be an

agreement between us and the EU, and that agreement must include protecting the status of UK nationals living, working and studying elsewhere in the EU.

The motion calls for the introduction of legislative proposals in this Session to unilaterally safeguard the rights of EU citizens living in the UK. I have just explained why we should not be taking unilateral action on this issue, as it would be wrong for British citizens. The motion is a little late, as the Government have already announced a new Bill to enshrine the withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU in our domestic law.

**Catherine West:** What consideration has the Minister or his team given to the case of the 3million campaign group, which is seeking to examine the fact that when EU nationals arrived under a different treaty they had nothing to do with the Home Office? One of the group's fears is that the Home Office and its procedures may lead to a complicated procedure, whereas a light touch approach, perhaps from a local authority, may be more appropriate for those who arrived under free movement and with a different set of rights.

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Lady makes a fair point. As she may appreciate, I have met the 3million and my team continues to meet it, as it is one of the user groups involved in designing the system we will use. As I have said, this system will be streamlined and simple, and it will be designed through working with the very user groups that will be accessing it, to make sure we can grant settled status swiftly, efficiently and effectively.

The withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill will directly implement the contents of the withdrawal agreement, including the agreement on citizens' rights, in UK law by primary legislation. As I say, this is why the SNP is somewhat behind the curve. This approach will allow Parliamentary scrutiny and oversight of the process, and it will mean that the agreement on citizens' rights will have direct enforcement and effect in UK law. Ahead of any primary legislation, we are planning to set up a voluntary application process in 2018, so that EU citizens and their family members who want to get their new UK immigration status at their earliest convenience will be able to do so efficiently, swiftly and effectively.

EU citizens worried about their status here have the Government's complete assurance that we want them to stay, that we value their presence here, both in our communities and in our economy, and that they continue to be welcome here in the UK. Given that it is in the interests of all parties to protect the rights of their citizens once the UK exits the EU, we are confident that both EU citizens and UK nationals will be protected through a reciprocal arrangement. As I have said, we are now very close to reaching an agreement that will protect EU citizens and UK nationals alike, so any attempt to take unilateral positions would risk undermining our ability to secure protection for the rights of UK nationals living in the EU. When we reach this agreement with the EU, the Government will then enshrine it in primary legislation, providing certainty to the millions of EU citizens who have made the UK their home.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. Before I call the shadow Minister, let me say that there are still a lot of Members wishing to speak and so after the shadow Minister I am going to impose a time limit of three minutes.

6.2 pm

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The International Trade Secretary told the Tory party conference last year that the Government

“would like to be able to give a reassurance to EU nationals in the UK, but that depends on reciprocation by other countries”.

He said any other strategy

“would be to hand over one of our main cards in the negotiations and doesn’t necessarily make sense at this point”.

That is using the EU nationals here as bargaining chips—that is the Government’s approach. This could have all been resolved quickly if the Government had made a unilateral guarantee of rights, as Labour Members were pushing for, and it would certainly have been reciprocated by the EU. At the start of the negotiations, the EU tabled an offer that opened the doors to a reciprocal arrangement. Had the UK accepted it and worked with the EU on the details, we may have settled the issue by now. But the UK did not take that course and instead has created a climate of uncertainty and confusion. That uncertainty has already led to discrimination against EU citizens.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con) *rose*—

**Afzal Khan:** I am going to make some progress, as we have limited time. Labour and the EU citizens’ rights group the 3million found more than two dozen examples of job, housing and other adverts that illegally prevented applications from EU nationals. Those adverts have been reviewed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which has written to a number of the advertisers. How can EU nationals who have been here for decades continue to feel welcome if we allow discrimination of that kind?

Even the Home Office is finding it hard to deal with the confusion. Over the summer, it sent hundreds of letters to EU nationals living in the UK, ordering them to leave the country or face deportation. The letters were intimidating and unsettling, especially given the fact that the recipients were in the UK perfectly legally. Instead of providing assurances from day one, the Government made their own offer on EU citizens’ rights. Their so-called settled status offer has been extensively criticised by the 3million. The Government must urgently improve their offer and stop acting as if this settled status is a settled matter.

The problem with settled status is that the Government seem to think that assimilating EU nationals into our existing immigration system is sufficient. That was the vision set out in the leaked Home Office White Paper, but it is not sufficient. The Government will have to realise quickly that both our non-EEA and EEA immigration systems need a total overhaul. Moreover, although this debate focuses on EU nationals in the UK, let us not forget British citizens living in EU27 countries. Despite the pensioner stereotype, some 80% of them are working, often on a cross-border basis. What are the Government doing to secure their right to freedom of movement and the recognition of their professional qualifications? What assurances

can the Minister give today that those rights will be guaranteed before we proceed to phase 2 of the negotiations?

Another problem is the attitude of some Government Members, who seem to imply that EU nationals are lucky to be in this country, rather than acknowledging the value they bring and the contribution they make to our economy and communities, particularly our public services and not least the NHS. There are 58,000 EU nationals working in NHS hospitals and community health services in England alone.

**Suella Fernandes:** The Prime Minister has said clearly, “we want you to stay”

and that we value their commitment. What part of that does the hon. Gentleman not understand?

**Afzal Khan:** It is clear that things are still confusing for everyone. What part of this does the hon. Lady not understand—that we need to give a simple offer so that we can move on?

In total, there are 2.4 million EU migrants working in the UK, and a far greater proportion of them are in work than of the population as a whole. They make a huge contribution. What they desperately need now is certainty before the conclusion of phase 1 of the talks. This is what the hon. Lady needs to understand: we need certainty for EU citizens in the UK, for UK citizens in the EU and for the businesses and communities in which they have built their lives. The Government have provided none, as they are still busy negotiating with themselves.

It seems to be an alien concept to the Government, but citizens have rights. EU nationals came here in good faith when their rights were guaranteed under freedom of movement rules. Rather than guaranteeing those rights, the Government are offering them the opportunity to reapply for them, charging them for the privilege, and then pretending that nothing much has changed. That is transparently false. No wonder the EU negotiators seem to believe that the Government are incompetent. The Opposition value EU nationals; it is high time that the Government did, too, and followed up their warm words with action.

6.8 pm

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My constituency of Banff and Buchan voted to leave the EU—

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) *indicated dissent*.

**David Duguid:** That is according to University of East Anglia analysis; look it up. The constituency voted to leave, but it was not because the local people are hostile to immigrants. Indeed, immigrants from inside and outside the European Union are welcome and valued contributors to our community. There is no doubt that EU citizens make a great contribution to the economy of Banff and Buchan. One of our key local industries, food manufacturing and processing, has the highest proportion of workers from the EU of any UK sector, with 33% of its labour consisting of EU nationals. Throughout the UK, the industry employs 120,000 people.

Although many EU nationals choose to make their permanent home in Banff and Buchan, many choose to stay for a time to work and then move on. That creates a constant demand for more workers, especially when factors such as poor infrastructure, particularly poor broadband infrastructure, sadly drive many local young people out of the area.

I am sure that it will come as no surprise to the House that one of the chief reasons why my constituents decided to vote leave was the impact of the EU common fisheries policy on our local fishing industry. Leaving the European Union and the common fisheries policy will mean leaving the single market and putting an end to the free movement of labour.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP) *rose*—

**David Duguid:** I cannot give way, I am sorry.

The prospect of needing more immigration in the area because we have more fish than we can catch and process is a welcome one. However, it is clear that there is a real need to develop our local workforce in the long term. That includes not only our own home-grown workforce, but the EU citizens and their children who have made their home here. That can be done outside the EU, as taking back control over immigration does not mean an end to immigration, nor should it. Bearing in mind the great contribution of EU nationals, and as someone who has an international family of my own—my wife is from Azerbaijan—I am, like the Prime Minister and the UK Government, in favour of guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens already living in the UK. It is right that we provide protection and reassurance to families and businesses as quickly as we can. However, that must work both ways, and what we are debating today is the idea of unilaterally granting rights without securing those same rights for British citizens abroad. I agree with SNP Members that Europeans who have made their home in Scotland are indeed very welcome, but the same must be true for Scots who have made their homes in Europe.

What we are doing in leaving the EU is not a game, and the question of rights after Brexit affects millions of people—not just EU citizens in the UK, but UK citizens in the EU. It is very disappointing to see the Scottish National party—a party that claims to stand up for Scotland—willing to put Scots living outside the UK last. Neither EU nor UK citizens should be used as bargaining chips—

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

6.11 pm

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) that it is an absolute disgrace that, 18 months after the referendum, our highly valued EU nationals still do not know with any certainty what lies in store for them. Those well respected, hard-working, tax-paying members of our society have been treated appallingly by this Government who, despite numerous opportunities to do so, have ignored all opportunities to make a unilateral guarantee to our EU nationals that their current status will remain unaltered when the UK leaves the European Union. I repeat the appeal today: regardless of what others do, please will the Government

do the right thing and guarantee to those EU citizens, who are living, working and contributing economically and socially to the wellbeing of this country, that their status will not change with Brexit and that they are welcome here?

Like other Members who have spoken, my mailbox has been full with letters from worried people, and my surgeries have a steady stream of people looking for some certainty. Let me give the Minister one example—that of Katarzyna Zalewska, a Polish EU citizen who has lived in my home town of Helensburgh for the past 12 years with her young son.

Katarzyna is a highly qualified, respected and experienced multilingual social worker, working in the area of domestic violence reduction among communities in which English is not the first language. She recently applied for UK citizenship, so keen is she to stay in Scotland after Brexit. On 9 October, she received a letter from the Home Office informing her that her application had been refused on the minor technicality that she had not provided her blue residence card. UK Visas and Immigration could not be satisfied that she was a permanent resident on the date of her application for naturalisation. It said to her:

“The fact that that you have been refused is not because you do not qualify for Permanent Residence, it is because you have not provided a Permanent Residence Blue Card.”

That is patently absurd. Her blue card may have expired, it may have been lost, but she has provided references from her employers and a host of other documentary evidence. The irony is that, very shortly afterwards, we all received the updated Home Office guidelines on settled status which said that EU citizens

“will not have their applications refused on minor technicalities.”

I ask the Minister to look again at Katarzyna's case.

Looking at the wider picture, I have to ask why we are putting people through this emotional wringer. Why are we deliberately making it so difficult for people who simply want to get on with their lives?

I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife that Scotland needs a bespoke immigration policy. If the Government here cannot provide what Scotland needs, then they must devolve immigration policy to the Scottish Government. We want a policy of thanking and appreciating those from abroad who have chosen to make their home in Scotland.

6.14 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is with some sadness that I rise to speak in this debate, because my constituency has received proportionally more migrants from eastern Europe than anywhere else in the country. Of all places, Boston and Skegness knows the value that people from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and elsewhere bring to our local economy. Today we have heard a great deal about surgeries being flooded with people worried about their livelihoods. If I may be blunt, surgeries may be flooded if Members scaremonger and tell people that they might not be welcome here. Being prepared to weaponise the lives and livelihoods of people who have come to this country in good faith, and who the Prime Minister has said are welcome to stay, is not good politics or good democracy. Frankly, it is shameful conduct over a genuinely important matter for constituents on the part of people with other political motives.

[*Matt Warman*]

Government Members have a responsibility, which we are prepared to take up, to reassure people who are genuinely concerned about their future in this country. We have already heard from the Government Front Bench—from not only the Prime Minister but a number of members of the Government—a solid and sensible pitch that we want people to stay. People who have asked for EU nationals to leave do not represent the mainstream of Brexit voters, and they do not represent a large number of people. In my constituency, the only people who ask for “foreigners to go home”, as it is often put, are either those who seek to misrepresent the views of Brexit voters or those who have their own nakedly racist proposition. Neither position represents the views of the Conservative party. We in politics have a duty to reassure our constituents. I know that the small number of people—I mean less than 10—who have come to my surgery seeking reassurance have received just that. They have gone away knowing that this Government seek to provide them with what they need.

I will end by asking, what can Members of this House do? Well, we can do things such as invite the Polish ambassador to our constituency, as I have done. We can stand on a platform with him and say, “This Government welcome the contribution of EU nationals. We want you to stay, and we will deliver that deal as best we can.”

6.17 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Do not the unintended consequences of the decision to leave the EU seem to be appearing thick and fast? The implications of restrictions on EU nationals seem to be among the most unexpected, for some folks at least.

There has been some talk of scaremongering today, so let us hear the case of my constituent, Françoise Milne. She is French and has lived in the UK—mainly in Scotland—for 24 years. She has been married to a Scot for those 24 years and they have three children together. She has been refused a residency card for not exercising her treaty rights. She maintained the family home and reared three children while her husband served in the Marines, including on tours of duty in Bosnia and in Northern Ireland. He spent more than two decades in service and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He is a member of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms, which is perhaps more commonly known as the Queen’s Bodyguard. The Home Office says that his wife cannot prove that she can support herself. Her husband’s income and her smaller income together provide for the matrimonial home and family life. The love and support she has provided for her husband helped him in his service. The idea that she not been exercising her treaty rights is ludicrous. I have written to Ministers and await an answer, but hers is not the only case that I have been asked to help with.

Marco Truffelli moved from Italy to London as a young man nearly 30 years ago. He built a career in the tourism industry, including as chief executive of VisitScotland for five years. His international management company has prestigious clients and he brings wealth into the UK, but his application for citizenship was refused on the grounds that he could not prove that he

was resident in the UK. That was despite providing the receipts from HMRC that the Home Office asked for as proof of residence.

Mr Truffelli is married to a Scotswoman and has three children here. He never thought he would need to prove he had a right to live here. He applied for citizenship following the referendum. If Mr Truffelli does not match the profile of EU citizens this Government will accept, who can? I have also written to Ministers about Mr Truffelli’s case.

Those are just two examples. There are many people with different stories to tell, but a common thread among the constituents coming to see me—and, I imagine, a whole lot of other Members—is the fear that people have: fear that they will no longer be welcome in their home, and that a bureaucratic decision will see them sent away from their family or left without a secure right to stay here. I have constituents who are living in fear of the state. Members should consider that: a modern state—a supposed democracy—where people live in fear of its actions.

All these people, who are making our communities better places to live, are swinging in the wind because this Government are in thrall to a xenophobic wing of the Conservative party and a right-wing, anti-foreigner media. That is ironic for a party stuffed with people who are proud of their ancestry—the Angles, the Saxons and the Normans, that is.

6.20 pm

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): And also the Dutch, in my case, but I will move swiftly on.

I welcome this debate and the chance to highlight the Government’s commitment to this issue. I welcome the Minister’s statement that we are close to an agreement, and I agree with him that the Prime Minister has worked hard to make sure we are in the right place on this issue. However, I mostly welcome the chance to thank people for the contribution they make when they come to this country and work. They work in industries of which we can be proud. They lead on science in our universities, and in our building industry and our NHS. Why on earth would we not want to encourage and promote their security? What we have been shown is the complete lack of understanding of what a negotiation is by the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins).

**Stephen Gethins:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Jo Churchill:** I have three minutes; the hon. Gentleman had considerably more.

One of the points the hon. Gentleman made was that the husband of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford)—he is a German—has worked long and hard in the NHS. However, the hon. Gentleman showed no care for those British people who might be working abroad, and that is what the negotiation is about.

On the progress that has been made to date, of the 60 aspects we have been discussing, we are on target with 37. The UK has done more than the EU27 countries to bring the process to where it currently is, as is widely recognised. We have reached a crucial moment in the negotiations, and it is important that the processes the Minister spoke about are seamless and that they happen. HMRC will certainly have a part to play, although I

would like to understand a little more whether it is the right body to take things forward, because it is not always as fluid an operation as we would like.

There is still progress to be made on this deal—on citizens, the direction of talks, the structure of negotiations and the UK's future more broadly. Jobs have a crucial part to play in that, and we do not want to destroy the brilliant economy we have, which encourages people into this country.

We need to look after not only the 3 million EU citizens we have, but the 1.2 million of our citizens abroad. That is what we will do, because it is right. It is clear that the negotiations are at a crucial stage, and we must ensure not only that we unstick them and get the best deal for everybody involved, but that we in this House do not behave impatiently with arrogance, or in a way that would critically endanger those people.

6.23 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Living with uncertainty in our life brings a lot of stress, and we have seen a stunning lack of empathy, exemplified by the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), about what people are going through.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) pointed out, we have all been helped by, treated by, served by and supported by EU nationals, and we all probably have good reasons to be grateful to them. To us in the highlands, they are our friends, our neighbours and our colleagues. They happen to come from other parts of Europe. This uncertainty visited upon them is no way to treat our friends, without whom businesses in the highlands face the danger of scaling down and even having difficulties functioning. From cradle to grave, they make a positive impact on Scotland, especially in the highlands, where population growth is essential.

Without inward migration, there will be more older people—incidentally, Mr Deputy Speaker, there is nothing wrong with older people; I have harboured a lifelong ambition to become one and I am making good progress—and a greater need for pensions and healthcare than can be met by their own contributions. We must not forget that older people did their bit when they were younger.

Free of Brexit, it was projected that 90% of Scotland's population growth over the next 10 years would come from migration, especially in the highlands. It is a cold fact that without migrants, we have more deaths than births. Some 30% of the highlands and islands population live in very remote areas. We need people to help them. The fact that young people are leaving means that we need EU nationals and their families in the highlands.

EU nationals support our health service. Six per cent. of NHS clinicians in Scotland are EU citizens and the figure is higher in the rest of the UK. We have already estimated that we cannot recruit all the regulated staff—doctors and nurses—for hospitals and surgeries to fulfil our future need. As was pointed out earlier, the Royal College of Nursing has seen applications from EU nationals collapse by 96%. Coping with an ageing population is looking incredibly difficult. In the care sector, a survey of Camphill communities pointed out

that 170 out of their 251 staff working with people with learning difficulties were EU nationals, with only five UK citizens.

The same is true of the food and drink, tourism and construction industries. As we heard just this morning, an unprecedented alliance of seven of the construction industry's major bodies has come together to talk about the industry facing a cliff edge over EU workers and an inability to deliver infrastructure. The National Federation of Builders and others have said that this is a disaster.

We need EU nationals across the UK, but especially in Scotland and absolutely desperately in the highlands.

6.26 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): EU nationals living in the United Kingdom form an integral part of the economic, cultural and social fabric of this country. I should declare an interest, as I am married to one. My wife hails from Stockholm. Therefore, it is no surprise that I am very supportive of the principle that it should be business as usual for EU nationals, even if only to have a quiet home life. That is the right thing to do.

We have always been an open, attractive and welcoming country. As Ruth Davidson said at the Conservative party conference in 2016:

“for those who have already chosen to build a life, open a business, make a contribution, I say this is your home, and you are welcome here.”

I associate myself fully and unreservedly with those comments. The Conservative party has ever stood with those who, as John Major said, have the “guts and drive” to travel to another country thousands of miles away to work to better themselves and improve the lot of their families. After all, those are innately Conservative instincts.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andrew Bowie:** I will not, given the time.

The Prime Minister has explicitly confirmed that the United Kingdom does not want anyone who is living legally in the UK to be asked to leave because of our exit from the European Union. It is every bit our desired outcome that it will be possible for EU citizens who are already here to be treated just the same as if they were British subjects. No EU national will be treated as a second-class citizen.

The SNP's scaremongering on this issue is utterly shameful. Putting fear into the hearts of EU nationals by making false claims about their future in this country is an utter disgrace, and SNP Members should be ashamed. They know full well that negotiations on the bilateral agreement have been going on from the very start of the Brexit process. It was one of the first issues that our negotiators sought to resolve. The Government have made it explicit that they do not want to use EU citizens' future rights as a bargaining chip, but they cannot risk allowing the future of UK citizens in the EU to become a bargaining chip either.

We are making progress. As recently as October, the Prime Minister wrote in an open letter that the UK Government and our partners in Brussels were “in touching distance” of a deal on citizens' rights. Nothing

[Andrew Bowie]

from any other European leader has contradicted that, and Michel Barnier has agreed that an agreement is close. The SNP wants somehow to unilaterally grant rights to one side, just at the point when we are so close to agreeing an arrangement that guarantees the rights of everyone. That is total madness.

EU nationals are welcome and will always be welcome in the United Kingdom, but I urge SNP Members to think very carefully about how seriously their motion would jeopardise the chances of their Scottish constituents enjoying similar rights in the rest of the European Union.

6.29 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I rise to represent East Lothian, an agricultural constituency that relies heavily on EU workers at certain times of the year. The constituency relies on EU workers for our care services, and it houses a great many EU citizens who work in the university sector, in our own Queen Margaret University.

We have historically had very close relationships with Europe, especially with Italy. I am thinking about the families, who still live in our community, who moved to my constituency in the 19th century from Barga, in Tuscany, when there was an economic problem. Sixty per cent. of the people who live in Barga, a town with 10,000 residents, can say that they have Scottish relatives, many of whom live in Musselburgh, Tranent, Port Seton and Cockenzie.

There is a lack of confidence among EU citizens about the Government's intentions, and I hear a lot of cries across the Chamber. Perhaps it is for the Government to clarify their position more succinctly and definitely. I raise the example that I have set out because the connections that exist are deep. Is it too much to ask that our neighbours, friends and workers have their rights secured and understand what those rights will be?

6.30 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Britain is undoubtedly one of the most open, tolerant and welcoming countries on earth. EU citizens have benefited our economy and our society hugely over the last few years, and they have brought a great diversity to our towns, cities and rural communities. Despite the fall in value of the pound and the negative headlines that have appeared since almost the day after the Brexit vote, the net migration figure of close to a quarter of a million is testament to what a great country this still is, not just to visit, but in which to work and make one's home. People really value that, as I hear from my constituents and EU nationals who come to talk to me about the matter.

That is probably why even before article 50 was triggered, the Prime Minister said that we wanted to deal with the rights of EU nationals at the very earliest opportunity. I remind the House that the EU stated that that would not be dealt with until after we had triggered article 50. The EU left people in a state of limbo during the months in which we waited to commence negotiations. I welcome the fact that we are "in touching distance" of reaching an agreement on the matter, but, as someone who supported remain in the referendum, I was deeply disappointed with the EU's initial approach.

To do as the motion suggests now—when we are, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) pointed out a moment ago, within touching distance of reaching agreement in the negotiations—would be a gross error for the 1.2 million people from this country who are making their lives overseas. If anyone thinks that we can do that and everything will be all right, they need to think about some of the negotiating positions that the EU and its member states have taken.

Let me just talk about one EU member state, Spain. Right from the start, Spain linked this issue to sovereignty over Gibraltar. I remind the House that we have just witnessed an event in Catalonia that shows a great deal of bad grace and bad faith on Spain's part. What are we supposed to do? On this point, are we supposed to hand over absolutely everything, effectively allowing the EU and its member states to take unilateral action or to threaten and say whatever they want? That would be a grave negotiating error.

6.33 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): We have heard a lot from Government Members about EU citizens being valued and welcome, but words are cheap in that regard. I go out and speak to EU citizens every weekend. More often than not, when I knock on doors I will meet an EU citizen, because they are fully integrated into the community and so they are often the partners, husbands, wives or flatmates of British citizens. I am talking not about what I say to them, but about what they say to me. They are genuinely distressed and upset, and they feel as though they are being treated as second-class citizens. That is not just because of the failure to grant or promise them rights, but because of what they are being offered.

The most recent document is the so-called technical note. That is a disingenuous phrase, because the document is a policy statement that gives EU citizens rights that are less than they would otherwise have. We do not know yet whether that will be the final version. The fact remains that there will have to be an application process, and there will be a fee. That applies even to those who have permanent residence already. There will be requirements on such citizens that are more onerous than the ones they currently have to meet. All of that sends out the signal that they will not have a status equal to what they have at the moment, but will have second-class status.

The Government should accept—I cannot better what the 3million group has said in response to the technical note—that such people want the same rights as now, and they should be granted that without having to pay a fee and without having to go through a long and bureaucratic process. If the Government do not accept that, the signal they are sending out to EU nationals in this country is they are not as welcome as they should be.

People are already voting with their feet. They are not going to make decisions in a year's time; they are making them now. These are often talented people who could work elsewhere, and if the Government wish them to leave the country and work elsewhere, they should at least be up front about that. They are suggesting, through the backdoor, that EU citizens currently resident

in this country are not going to have the same rights and will not be treated on the same basis, but will have to go through identity checks and residence checks in order to stay in this country. Why should they put up with such a change of attitude and such a change of status?

The Minister should be able to say in response to the motion, first, that there will be a unilateral decision, and secondly, that that decision will be for a status that is exactly equal to what residents have now. If she cannot do that, all the words that Ministers have said will carry no weight, and we will see that they are placing less value on EU citizens than they have now.

6.36 pm

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** I am proud to live in a country where fundamental decency and neighbourliness lead us to welcome newcomers and embrace them as our own. There is something inspiring about our warm embrace of citizens from all over the world. It is often said that tolerance is one of the British virtues, but I believe it goes beyond that: it goes beyond tolerance to a warm acceptance and a sense of celebration about our diversity.

We should be gratified that so many people from around the world chose to make the United Kingdom their home, and they make a full contribution to the society they live in. They are an economic positive; indeed, an economic necessity—students, entrepreneurs, skilled workers and valued employees. Before my election to this place, I had the privilege to work alongside and lead teams of wonderful colleagues from across the EU—talented, motivated and inspiring people—who had chosen to come to the United Kingdom and build their future lives here. Every one of those wonderful people, my former colleagues, should, in common with all other EU nationals living and working in our country, be assured of their position in our society, which is as much theirs as it is mine.

That is why the priority, first and foremost, of Her Majesty's Government in our negotiations with the EU was, from the very outset, to secure the status of EU citizens living in the United Kingdom and that of British nationals living in the EU. This debate is somewhat redundant because we have received assurances, as we did again from the Minister today, that we are “within touching distance” of an agreement to safeguard these rights.

SNP Members have brought forward this issue for debate—they do so with alarming frequency—because every time they do they try to tell people, despite a thousand assurances to the contrary, that their right to stay in this country is somehow at risk. No EU national currently living in the UK lawfully should have any fear, whatever the scaremongers on the SNP Benches may say, about having to leave the United Kingdom when our country leaves the EU.

SNP Members spread fear and panic because they think there is some party political advantage in doing so, but fear and panic are entirely unjustified. Their implication that Conservative Members are somehow plotting to ship back our friends, our neighbours, our work colleagues, our partners and our families to the country they came from is absurd, but it is an absurd narrative that they delight in because absurdity is their speciality.

Whatever spin SNP Members try to put on this situation, the fact is that the people of Britain—the family of nations and regions that make up our United Kingdom—voted to leave the European Union. EU nationals are welcome in this country, and will continue to be welcome here. Frankly, I do not think that the British people who have EU nationals as friends, family, neighbours, colleagues and partners would stand for any other policy, and it is disreputable of SNP Members to suggest that they would. I am happy that this House should take a lead from our neighbours and our friends, as well as from our EU nationals, who are under no threat whatsoever from this Government.

6.39 pm

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** I am prepared to accept the Government's stated position that they will ensure that many EU citizens living here will stay after this negotiation. I am sure that that is the case. However, I hope that the Minister will have the frankness and honesty to accept the facts and figures that show that many EU nationals have already left since the referendum, which is damaging many aspects of our society and economy.

**Brandon Lewis:** That is wrong.

**Sir Edward Davey:** It is not wrong. I have shown the figures to the Minister. I have talked to businesses and to the local hospital in Kingston, and they are all worried about recruitment and people having gone home.

**Brandon Lewis:** The simple fact is that net migration was 246,000 last year. The figures are up for EU nationals coming to this country.

**Sir Edward Davey:** I am afraid that those figures show what has happened in the past. If the Minister talked to businesses and to people working in the health service, he would know that the position is changing significantly and quickly. He is in a completely ridiculous world if he thinks that that is not the case.

I want to challenge the Minister. If he is going to welcome EU nationals, he and his colleagues need to do various things. Italian and German nationals, and other friends and colleagues, have shown some of us job adverts saying that only British passport holders can apply. Will he ensure that the full weight of the law will go against those putting out those adverts, because they are illegal? We need to make sure that that discrimination, which is appearing in our society, is clamped down on. I hope he will give that reassurance from the Dispatch Box and tell us what measures he and his colleagues will take to prevent that discrimination, which is affecting EU nationals here and making them feel unwelcome.

Will the Minister say more—the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about this—about whether the systems that will be put in place will be easy and welcoming, not difficult and expensive? I have a concrete case for him. An EU national with permanent residency in the UK applied and paid for it. The Government—wrongly, in my view—are asking them to apply again for settled status. Given that they have already paid for permanent residency, will the Minister commit from the Dispatch Box that they will not be charged for having to apply again for settled status?

[Sir Edward Davey]

If an EU national who has not been able to provide proof of residency is given temporary status for two years—a new Government proposal for which the EU national will have to pay—will they have to pay again when they apply for settled status after five years? I hope that the Minister will make it clear that they will not have to do so.

I hope that the Minister will also make it clear that the whole registration process will be simple. He said that in his speech, but will he take up the idea suggested by the 3million group that, in order to register, people should just have to prove that they have lived here for the past five years and have proof of identity? That would make it simple, quick and unbureaucratic. I hope that he will commit to that from the Dispatch Box tonight.

I hope that the Minister will reassure people about how the negotiations on family reunion are going. This is one of the sticking points about which the 3million group is most worried, because its members see the UK Government taking away rights that they thought they had in the past and preventing them from bringing their relatives here. The group has set out its views in detail. It believes that the UK's settled status proposal is not fit for purpose and should be rejected. It has set out in detail why that is the case and has suggested an alternative. The group is worried about it because it does not trust the Home Office. Many of its members have worked with the Home Office in the past and they feel that it is slow and bureaucratic and that it makes mistakes and is unreliable. They do not want to have to go through that process in the same way as other people who have suffered in the past.

6.43 pm

**Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): The UK Government absolutely recognise the necessity to address uncertainties. To that effect, the Prime Minister has already committed to maintaining EU citizens' rights. Many Government Members, including the Minister, have risen—I will not repeat everything they have said—to make that clear.

I declare an interest as a farmer and a food processor. I do not grow broccoli, but the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) has mentioned how important foreign and EU workers are in that regard. Opposition Members do not have a monopoly on this issue. Foreign and EU nationals are important to all hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman). Foreign nationals are monumentally important to the oil industry in constituencies such as Gordon, Aberdeen North, Aberdeen South and that of my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie). The businesses I speak to are relatively positive, in contrast to what the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) described. Members of Parliament should do their utmost to reassure those constituents who are still anxious about their status that they are absolutely entitled to stay in this country.

With that in mind, we should now do everything in our power to ensure that what is enshrined in UK law regarding the rights of EU citizens living and working

in this country is also integrated into EU law with regard to the 1 million UK citizens living and working in other EU countries. Those UK nationals based abroad deserve just as much certainty as EU citizens residing here. I look forward to a reciprocal agreement as soon as possible.

6.45 pm

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to sum up the debate. I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not mention everyone's contributions, but I do not think I have enough time even to read out the names of all their constituencies—it does give the lie to the myth that the SNP is never interested in talking about anything important, given that both our debates today have been so oversubscribed that they could easily have run for four or five hours each. Instead, I want to pick up on the main themes that have come out on both sides of the debate.

Let me draw the House's attention to this document, "The Contribution of EEA Citizens to Scotland", which was produced by the Scottish Government a few days ago. It is only 49 pages long, so it is an extremely brief summary of that contribution. The foreword states:

"The Scottish Government believes fundamentally that continuing free movement of people is in the best interests of Scotland and the UK as a whole."

What a shame, and what a disgrace, that the United Kingdom Government refuse point blank to accept that, because although we have been told that there was a referendum in this country on leaving the European Union, there has been no referendum on the free movement of people or on the single market, and in one country in this Union—this is also true of the local authority that includes Banff and Buchan—62% of people voted to remain.

Many specific cases have been raised by the Opposition, and no doubt we could have heard many more, had there been more time, and of course there are a great many more such individuals who, for various reasons, do not want to be identified. One Member asked in an intervention what part of the reassurances we do not understand, missing the point completely; it is the 3 million people outside this Chamber who also need to understand, and they are simply not reassured. We have heard Conservative Members say that the SNP is scaremongering. Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament are accusing Scottish National party Members of Parliament of scaremongering about the results and consequences of a referendum. You could not make it up, Mr Deputy Speaker—they could, and indeed they did.

Another major theme that we have heard from Conservative Members is that the Government genuinely care about the rights of EU nationals living in the United Kingdom. Why then did it take nine months after the referendum, and a full-scale Select Committee inquiry and report, before the Government realised that their system for allowing EU nationals to stay here permanently was utterly unfit for purpose and, in the view of those 1.5 million people, clearly designed to deter them from applying? Are those the actions of a Government who care as much—[*Interruption.*] It is not rubbish; it is in the Select Committee's report. If I had time, I would offer to give way to anyone who could tell me that they had read the Select Committee's report; clearly, Government Members have not.

We have heard it said that we cannot give unilateral guarantees because that would prejudice the position of the 3 million UK citizens living in the other EU countries. If they had bothered to read the report—certainly if the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), who described the recommendation as “total madness”, had bothered to read it—they would have seen that the recommendation was unanimous and that the Committee, before the last general election, contained a majority of Conservative MPs. Madness! They might even have recognised the names of some of those responsible for that unanimous act of madness, because one is now the Environment Secretary and one is the Justice Secretary. If he wants to tell them they are mad, I think that he can say “bye bye” to his political career, almost before it has started.

British citizens living abroad want the House to agree the motion tonight, because they believe that it is in their best interest that the UK make the first move, but I will finish with one final point. When the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) used the phrase “bargaining chips”, which came from Ministers initially, not from us, there were howls of protest. What do we call it when Ministers say, “We cannot do A, although we’d like to, because if we do A, it makes it less likely that these people will do B, which we want them to do.”? That is called a negotiating tactic. And what do we call A and B in the standard parlance of negotiation? We call them “negotiating capital” or “bargaining chips”. They might not like it, but that is the language of their own International Trade Secretary.

If the Government refuse to accept the motion, or to act on it when it is passed, because they want to use the uncertainty they are creating in the minds of EU nationals here to try to get certainty in the minds of UK nationals living abroad, not only are they going against the unanimous views of a group that included a lot of their own MPs, including two Ministers, and not only are they undermining the wish of the 3 million people living on mainland Europe, but they are continuing to use all 4.5 million as bargaining chips. They do not like to hear that, but the only way they can stop the phrase being true is to stop treating them as bargaining chips and give the unilateral guarantees that the 1.5 million here and the 3 million over there so desperately want to hear.

6.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** I thank right hon. and hon. Members across the House who have participated in this debate on the very important issue of safeguarding the rights of EU citizens living here in the UK and those of UK citizens living in the EU after our withdrawal. I am glad that Parliament has had the chance to debate this issue again, and I hope we can reach some clarity at the end of it. I have heard many SNP Members describe the worries and concerns of their constituents and the alleged uncertainty people feel they are living under. May I please take this opportunity to clarify the situation? I hope then that SNP Members, who are clearly concerned about their constituents, will do the responsible thing and, the next time a constituent comes into one of their surgeries with these concerns, reiterate the Government’s position.

The Government’s position is as follows. *[Interruption.]* I would be grateful if SNP Members gave me a moment

to say this so that they—and their constituents, should they be watching—might understand the Government’s position. Those EU citizens and their family members who are worried about their status here have the Government’s complete assurance that we want them to stay and that they continue to be welcome in the United Kingdom. I ask that that position be clarified when constituents go to hon. Members’ surgeries, because I fear that that misunderstanding, which some of them are labouring under, might be contributing to their concerns.

**Stephen Gethins** *rose*—

**Victoria Atkins:** I will take just one intervention, because I am conscious of time.

**Stephen Gethins:** I think the Minister needs to understand that those points were raised in response to letters that constituents had received from the Government.

**Victoria Atkins:** I know that individual cases were raised, and I hope very much that those letters are being chased up if no replies have as yet been received. I also hope that, now that Members have heard the assurances given from the Dispatch Box today, they will communicate those assurances to their constituents while they await responses from the Home Office.

I have another clarification for the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). The discrimination in job advertisements that he described is wrong, and I can reassure him that the Government will continue to crack down on any such discrimination.

We heard today from my hon. Friends the Members for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Solihull (Julian Knight), for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and for Gordon (Colin Clark), all of whom represented the views of their constituents, and some of whose constituencies voted to leave. However, I must make a special mention of my hon. Friend, and Lincolnshire neighbour, the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), who has the honour of representing a constituency with one of the largest eastern European populations in the country. He set out very robustly the views of his constituents, not only those who are “yellowbellies” born and bred, but those who have had the good sense to move to his constituency from the European Union.

Since the result of the referendum last summer, the Government have made absolutely clear how important it is for us to secure the status of EU citizens here as soon as possible. As the Prime Minister said in her open letter to them, that is her first priority in the negotiations. The right to settled status will be defined in the withdrawal agreement, which will be implemented in United Kingdom legislation.

In respect of the negotiations, the Government wish to offer an assurance that we are close to reaching an agreement on citizens’ rights. There remain only a small number of outstanding issues to be agreed with our European partners. In the coming weeks, the focus will be on delivering an agreement that works for EU citizens living here and for UK nationals living in the EU. The fact remains, however, that there must be an agreement with the EU on this matter. We cannot just wish it away. Taking unilateral positions at this vital stage in the negotiations would risk the position of UK nationals

[Victoria Atkins]

who have also chosen to build their lives with their families in other countries. It would not be responsible for the Government to ignore them and enter into the unilateral agreements that have been urged on us by the Scottish nationalists.

The Government wish to reassure EU citizens throughout the United Kingdom that we are confident of reaching a deal that will enable them to carry on with their lives as before. As the Prime Minister has made clear, no EU citizen living lawfully in the UK will be required to leave when the UK withdraws from the EU. We recognise and value the huge contribution that EU citizens make to our economy, our health service, our schools, our care sector and our communities. We will act fairly towards them, just as we expect other EU countries to act fairly towards UK nationals living there. Safeguarding the rights of citizens is a shared priority for both sides in these negotiations, and a reciprocal agreement that works for all our citizens is now within touching distance.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House calls on the Home Secretary to introduce legislative proposals in this Session of Parliament, in line with the recommendation in paragraph 45 of the Second Report of the Exiting the European Union Committee of Session 2016-17, The Government's negotiating objectives: the rights of UK and EU citizens, HC 1071, that the Government should now make a unilateral decision to safeguard the rights of EU nationals living in the UK.

**Stephen Gethins:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance? This House has now agreed that there should be a unilateral decision to safeguard the rights of EU nationals. How can we instruct the Home Secretary, and when she will come before the House to deliver this?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** The instruction has been given earlier, but I will repeat it for the record, to make sure that we are all aware. The Leader of the House of Commons made it clear that

“the Government are determined to listen and take account of views from all sides of the House. Where there is opportunity for the Government to listen and better enable the effective work of Parliament, we will do so.

To that end, I am today updating the House on the Government's approach to Opposition day debates. Where a motion tabled by an Opposition party has been approved by the House, the relevant Minister will respond to the resolution of the House by making a statement no more than 12 weeks after the debate. This is to allow thoughtful consideration of the points that have been raised, facilitate collective discussion across Government, especially on cross-cutting issues, and to outline any actions that have been taken.

This is in line with suggestions made by Members across the House and I hope colleagues will welcome the new initiative and the opportunity for accountability this provides.”—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2017; Vol. 630, c. 12WS.]

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Given that sensible explanation from the Leader of the House, will that now be known as the “Leadsom principle”?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I think the hon. Gentleman has just named it.

## Universal Credit: Terminally Ill People

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

7.2 pm

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** I have raised many times in this place the subject of universal credit and the problems faced by my constituents and others across the nations of the UK. This debate is about UC and its effect on the terminally ill, and preparing for it has been one of the most humbling experiences of my parliamentary career so far. I pay special tribute to Marie Curie, the highland Macmillan-Citizens Advice partnership and the Motor Neurone Disease Association for their input, and especially to terminally ill claimants who have come forward with stories of the issues they face—stories of delays, difficulties, the deficits they face as disabled people, the complexities and frustrations that confront them, and the humiliations and indignities they have to suffer.

These are actually very simple things for the Government to fix, some of them at little or no cost to them. If the Chancellor is sincere in what he said in the Budget debate about wanting a civilised and tolerant place that cares for the vulnerable, he will take on board the representations I am making on behalf of those agencies and the terminally ill tonight.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and commend him on the work he has done over many years in highlighting the problems with UC. He mentioned the Chancellor's Budget, which was an admission that UC was failing some of the people he mentions. Does he agree that the Chancellor and the Government now need to go further to address the real issues at the heart of UC, such as those he mentions tonight?

**Drew Hendry:** Absolutely. We have all accepted the principle of a simpler benefit and the move to a single payment, but that simplification does not work if it is not simple for the users and instead becomes complex and difficult, which is what has happened.

As my hon. Friend points out, I have been raising issues with UC since 2013 when I was leader of the Highland Council, where we took UC through the pilot and on to live service and finally full service roll-out. During that time we spotted and reported the problems thrown up by UC, but until very recent weeks none of them have been taken on board. As my hon. Friend notes, we have recently seen an admission, however grudging, from the Government that there are problems—that the current system is broken. The Minister has an opportunity tonight to fix some of the areas in which it is broken.

Prior to universal credit being introduced, personal independence payment had a specified line for those who were terminally ill to call. Claimants on PIP who were terminally ill had their payments processed quickly, payments could be made weekly and implicit consent was available, giving supporting organisations the authority to make claims on behalf of terminally ill claimants. Many terminally ill people simply do not want to be told that they are dying, and PIP allowed them some consideration and dignity.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me permission to intervene on him and for bringing this matter to the House for our consideration. Does he agree that, just as disability living allowance had special rules for the terminally ill, universal credit must have compassionate grounds so that it can be adapted to an individual's circumstances? Each person has circumstances that are specific to themselves.

**Drew Hendry:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point, and I will underline it later in my speech.

I held a universal credit summit in my constituency, specifically to challenge the accusations of scaremongering that were coming from the Government Benches. I invited every Tory MP, along with Ministers and indeed the Prime Minister, to come to Inverness to hear testimony from agencies and claimants about the problems of universal credit. Had they attended, they would have heard from Elaine Donnelly, the caseworker at the highland Macmillan-Citizens Advice partnership. She has been dealing with the universal credit cases of cancer patients and the terminally ill. She describes herself as "battle-weary" and "numb" as a result of the number and type of claims that are coming forward and the fact that people are dying before their claims are processed. She told us about a claimant who was dying of cancer not knowing the outcome of her claim and being without any support for six weeks. I welcome the timely reduction of the waiting period to 5 weeks, by the way. It took her three months to get her payment, and when it came through it was wrong. A £500 deduction had been made for another benefit that had never been claimed or received.

Other claimants have included Lucy, a 22-year-old who had missed the deadline, which meant that her PIP and her mobility component were stopped. Her blue badge was lost and her mum's carer's allowance was taken away. It was hard work to sort that out. In another case, Jo-Ann's dad was told in April 2016 that there was nothing more the doctors could do, and he was moved from DLA to PIP that summer. He received two points—eight points are needed for the standard rate and 12 for the enhanced rate. The rules on terminal illness suggested that if the probability was that dying could be expected within six months, the claimant could apply under the special rules. However, the prognosis was unknown. The doctors were saying that it could be a month or a year, and it was unclear whether those rules would be an option, as the doctors could not reasonably say whether death would be likely within six months. Let us just imagine that discussion.

Jo-Ann's dad and the family had not come to terms with the prognosis, so they could not claim under the special rules. The process was incredibly difficult and caused a lot of stress. As the special rules option was not available, the application had to be followed in the usual way and PIP was not awarded. The mobility car was taken away, leaving Jo-Ann's dad unable to attend medical appointments or get shopping, due to their rural location, which had no bus services.

Jo-Ann also sat in with her dad, John, at the face-to-face assessment. She described the experience as "awful", saying:

"They pushed and pushed my dad until he gave them the answer they wanted."

When he was asked if he could walk 50 yards, he said no, so he was then asked if he could do it even if it took a long time. When he again said no, he was asked if he could do it if there was an emergency and he absolutely had to walk 50 yards. At that point, he felt so pressurised that he said yes. The overview of the assessment then said that he could "reasonably" walk 50 yards. The assessment process is deeply humiliating and degrading, putting claimants in a position where they often feel bad about not being able to carry out certain tasks and even about asking for extra assistance in the form of benefits.

I hope that no one here or watching the debate ever faces a diagnosis of cancer, motor neurone disease or any other terminal illness, yet that happens to people every day. It must be absolutely shattering not only for those who are diagnosed, but for their families. I imagine that the last thing on their minds would be going through the hoops to get the basic financial support that they need, yet that is what universal credit means in its current form.

I mentioned the Motor Neurone Disease Association, which states that MND is a devastating fatal disease that rapidly progresses through the brain and central nervous system, leaving people trapped in a failing body and unable to move, walk, talk, swallow or, eventually, breathe. It kills one third of people within the first year and more than half within two years. A small number survive longer. People with MND and other terminal illnesses and their families face significant financial burdens, with an estimated extra cost of £12,000 a year.

Universal credit needs to work smoothly for the terminally ill, but it does not, and there is nothing like it for causing stress. People do not need and should not suffer delays or stress, and a financial burden is the last thing that they should be asked to face. Universal credit should be easy, but not everyone can use the online portal. Many are simply unable to type. Completing an online application has been described by those who assist the terminally ill as

"extremely arduous and time consuming, often requiring outside help",

yet help is available only over the telephone, which is clearly inappropriate for anyone who is unable to speak.

The severe disability premium has been abolished under universal credit, costing disabled adults with no carer £62.45 a week or £3,250 a year. The enhanced disability premium was also abolished, costing disabled adults under the pension age £15.90 a week. The Department for Work and Pensions' stipulation that terminally ill claimants can apply only via special rules if death can be reasonably expected within six months does not work for many people with terminal illnesses. Health professionals are often confused by that condition and about whether they should sign the relevant form, which is known as a DS1500, meaning that people often do not get the swift support that they badly need. Whether people apply under the special rules or not, there is no customer journey specific to claimants with disabilities or vulnerabilities, especially the terminally ill. Those with severe and progressive conditions, including terminal illnesses, are all given work-focused interviews, which is clearly insensitive. As I mentioned earlier, some people do not want their doctor to tell them that they are dying, and it is cruel to ask them to self-certify their fate—cruel and unnecessary.

[Drew Hendry]

In conclusion, I have some simple low-cost or no-cost requests of the Minister that he can agree to given the relatively low number of terminally ill claimants: remove the waiting time, which should not be there, for terminally ill people; make the application simpler, which should be easy for this limited number of people; provide direct support or give implicit consent for agencies to apply on a claimant's behalf; reinstate the severe disability allowance and the enhanced disability premium for terminally ill people; provide a specific journey and special rules for the terminally ill; allow the DS1500 to be submitted by third parties without explicit consent; and, easiest of all, get rid of the cruel requirement for self-certification.

7.14 pm

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) on securing a debate on this important matter. These are, of course, extremely difficult situations, and we in turn must always be careful to treat them with the highest level of sensitivity.

I will begin by setting out the recently announced changes to universal credit, which of course apply to all recipients, before addressing the hon. Gentleman's specific points. We continue to roll out universal credit gradually, constantly improving the way the system works as we do so. I am sure that hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome the changes to universal credit that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced in his statement to the House last Thursday.

New guidance will be issued to staff next month to ensure that claimants in the private rented sector who have their housing benefit paid directly to landlords are offered that option when they join universal credit. We will make two changes to advances from January. First, the maximum period over which an advance is recovered will increase from six months to 12 months, making it easier for claimants to manage their finances. That will apply regardless of the level of advance claimed. Secondly, we are increasing the amount of support that a claimant can receive through an advance from up to 50% of their estimated entitlement to up to 100%. Of course, the advance is interest-free.

If someone is in immediate need, we can fast-track the payment so that they receive it on the same day. In practice, new claimants in December can already receive an advance of up to 50% of their estimated overall entitlement, and may receive a second advance in the new year to take it up to 100%. Taken with the first scheduled payment, that means that claimants in need could receive nearly double the amount of cash that they would previously have received over that period.

In addition, from spring next year, we will make it possible to apply for an advance online, further increasing accessibility for those who need it. From February we will remove the seven-day waiting period, reducing the time claimants might wait to receive their first full payment. From April, for new claimants already receiving support towards their housing costs, we will provide an additional payment of two weeks' housing benefit to

support them as they transition to universal credit, which will help to address the issue of rent arrears for those most in need.

It is important that I explain that the personal independence payment is a separate benefit to universal credit. It will continue to be paid weekly in advance to provide important financial support to help people to meet the additional costs of disability in the latter stages of their life. PIP is also not taken into account when assessing entitlement to universal credit. To be clear, PIP is not a benefit that is being replaced by universal credit. PIP and UC are not comparable, as they are not intended for the same thing.

Income-related employment and support allowance and the linked disability premiums, including the severe disability premium, are being replaced by universal credit as part of the process of simplifying benefits to help us address overlaps. To mirror the design of ESA, universal credit has two disability elements for adults. The higher rate is set at a substantially higher level than the equivalent support group level in ESA. By structuring the rates in that way, the Government are making it clear that they are not looking to make savings. Transitional protection will also be provided for those claimants who are transferred across to universal credit by the Department for Work and Pensions and who have not had a change of circumstances.

We will continue to listen to and act on feedback as we roll out universal credit. I regret to say that mistakes can be made in any benefits system and, when errors happen, I am sorry. Of course we recognise that people with health conditions or disabilities face extra challenges. People may be dealing with more than one condition or disability, and the same condition can affect people in different ways.

**Drew Hendry:** Will the Minister take on board some of the specific points that I raised? These things are easy to do and would cost nothing. Specifically, will he address the issues relating to self-certification? I also referred to other things that would be very easy to deliver, so will he consider any of those?

**Damian Hinds:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue. As we roll out universal credit, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that terminally ill patients are treated with the utmost sensitivity and care, and receive the support they need to make a UC claim.

It might be helpful if I briefly set out to the House how the claim process works in the pre-existing system—the legacy benefit system. Under that system, additional financial support can be obtained by someone who is terminally ill by making a claim to ESA. This is a manual process that requires an application to be completed via a telephone call or a paper-based form. As part of the process, the claimant is asked whether they would like to apply for ESA under “special rules”, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned. For ESA, “special rules” means someone who has a terminal illness with a prognosis of less than six months. The claimant is asked to provide medical evidence from their GP or medical practitioner confirming this. If the claimant has already provided the medical evidence to another part of the DWP, the Department will confirm that and make a referral to an expedited work capability assessment. That is entirely

clerical; it is a review of papers. The healthcare professional will provide a report, usually within 48 hours, confirming the claimant's prognosis and condition to the DWP, which will then be able to award immediate additional financial support by allocating the claimant to the support group. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the UC full service is designed to be accessed and claimed for online, although a claim can be made over the phone or via a home visit, which can be arranged if needed. Universal credit has a similar process in place to support claimants when they have been diagnosed as terminally ill to make sure that additional support is provided as quickly as possible.

I am aware of the concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman about the process of notifying the DWP about a claimant's terminal illness. However, we do not need to change the consent rules in UC to support these claimants; we can already accept information directly from claimant representatives, such as claimant appointees and third-party organisations representing the claimant. However, we are also aware that there are instances when this is not happening as intended, and we are working very hard to make sure that the system works properly, with all the necessary guidance and procedures in place to support terminally ill claimants and to help our operational staff to assist them.

As part of the training that our staff receive, they are made aware that claimants might not know their prognosis or condition and that they therefore should not record or refer to the nature or detail of the illness on the full service journal or in discussions, unless requested by the claimant. Our approach is, and always has been, that we must ensure that terminally ill claimants are treated sensitively and with empathy at all times.

When a claim is made to UC where the claimant is terminally ill, we want to ensure that claimants receive any eligible additional financial support as quickly as possible. To make sure that that happens, the claimant is asked if they have a terminal illness. We have already asked that question of ESA claimants, but using the terminology of "special rules". I must stress that, in effect, the two questions are the same. We changed the wording to make things clearer to the individual, and to make sure that people would be able to get the support to which they are entitled and which they need. That applies to new claims and to existing claims on a change of circumstances.

When somebody presents with such an illness, they are given the option of continuing to provide further information themselves, or of receiving support from the DWP to do so. When they indicate that they would like support, it becomes a high-priority task for a

case manager to telephone the claimant to gather the information on their behalf. A home visit can also be arranged.

The most usual way for claimants to supply evidence of such an illness is by providing the DS1500 form to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is issued for the DWP by a GP or healthcare professional, either to the claimant or to their representative. We check our systems immediately and as a matter of course to see whether we already hold a DS1500 that was submitted as part of another claim. If one is already held, we reuse it for the universal credit claim. Receipt of that information indicates to us that the claimant must receive immediate access to DWP support, and that support immediately results in an additional £318.78 per month being included in their universal credit entitlement. The additional amount is payable from day one of their claim. In addition, the claimant is completely removed from any conditionality requirements.

The Department and the universal credit programme have regular meetings with key stakeholders, including Macmillan, Maggie's centres and Mind, to understand how our policies are working, and to identify and discuss possible areas for improvement. I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has encountered universal credit claimants who have had issues with the service in his constituency. As I acknowledged earlier, things can go wrong, and when they do, I am sorry for that. If cases involve vulnerable claimants, it is particularly important that they are escalated, investigated and resolved quickly. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has an effective direct relationship with the Scotland complaint resolution team, as well as with our local operations team, which has helped to manage a number of urgent cases to successful resolution.

As we continue to deliver the full universal credit service—it is now available in 178 jobcentres—with its expanded claimant base, we are continuing to review and further develop the customer journey for claimants with complex needs, including by looking into how we support terminally ill claimants to engage in the process. In that context, I welcome the hon. Gentleman raising these important issues on the Floor of the House. I do recognise that there are areas for improvement in the service, but he has seen for himself the drive, commitment and passion of so many of our staff, stakeholders and people working across universal credit to see this important reform through.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.27 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 29 November 2017

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

## Migration Policy and the Economy

9.30 am

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the Government's migration policy on the economy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and to see the Minister in her place. We had a crossing of paths in Gloucestershire when she stood as our police and crime commissioner candidate in 2012. She was not successful on that occasion, but Gloucestershire's loss is very much the House's and the Home Office's gain. It is also a pleasure to see the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) here to speak for the Opposition. I will be happy to take interventions from hon. Members and listen to their contributions.

To summarise what I plan to say, my proposition is that migration can be good for Britain if it makes all of us richer, not just the people who have come here to work. It can benefit the public finances and help with the budget deficit, but only if the people coming have sufficient skills and earn a sufficiently high salary. After we have left the European Union, we should treat people who come to Britain from the European Union in the same way as people from elsewhere in the world. Anything else would be indefensible. The system should be based on people's skills and what they can contribute to the country, not where they are from. That will also make a tremendous difference to our efforts to strike trade deals around the world. That is the nub of my argument; I will now set it out in more detail.

I will talk primarily about migrants who come here to work or to look for work; I will not cover people who come here seeking refugee status, for family reunion or as students, although I will touch briefly on students towards the close of my remarks. I want to be clear that migrants who come to Britain with the right skills are to be welcomed: they come here, they do valuable jobs and they can benefit our economy as well as themselves. However, we should also consider our primary responsibility to the people who elect us to this place and ensure that our migration system benefits not only the people who come here, but the people who are here already.

When we debate the performance of the economy, the measure that we most commonly look at is the growth of GDP—the size of the economy—which has been positive since the Conservatives came to power soon after the economic crash, but we should also look closely at GDP per head, which is the size of the economy adjusted for the fact that there are more people in Britain. Perhaps that is something the Minister can pass on to colleagues in the Treasury. Of course not all population growth is to do with migration, but according to the Migration Observatory, just over half the population increase between 1992 and 2015 was due to migration. That is quite a significant amount. The rest was to do with things such as the ageing population. GDP growth per head in the time that we have been in

office is about 0.75% per year lower than GDP growth, and over a considerable period that makes a significant difference to how well off we are. We need to ensure that the people coming here contribute to the extent that they are not just making themselves better off, but increasing GDP per head. It is important to make British citizens better off as well.

I want to flag up how migration relates to the conversation we are having about productivity performance, which has been somewhat disappointing since the financial crash. The Chancellor spent a fair bit of time on that in last week's Budget, which we voted on last night. I do not want to overstate my case, because the academic research shows that there is no single cause of what some of the academic literature calls the "productivity puzzle". A lot of bright, smart people—far brighter and smarter than me—are not entirely certain what is at the root of it, but I posit that at least one aspect of productivity is to do with migration.

If we say to businesses that there is effectively an unlimited supply of all different sorts of labour that can come from the European Union and that can be hired relatively cheaply, it does not make much sense for those employers to invest significant capital sums in their business for the latest technology and labour-saving innovations that could help their existing workforce to become and stay more productive. If we were to say to employees that after an appropriate adjustment period that unlimited supply of labour from across the European Union will no longer be available, employers would look at investing capital into their businesses and at different and smarter ways to do things that would improve the productivity of their existing workforce. That would make Britain more competitive and deliver the only sustainable way to drive up wages in the public and private sectors: increasing productivity.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Ind): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Harper:** I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke).

**Charlie Elphicke:** My right hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. Is not the nub of his case that importing cheap labour from overseas disincentivises businesses from investing not just in kit, but in improving the skills of their employees and our workforce?

**Mr Harper:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is a big issue in his constituency of Dover, one of the gateway parts of our country.

It is perfectly right for us to look at what people can pay; we have rules in Britain about paying the national living wage. However, research done by the Bank of England in its staff working paper, "The impact of immigration on occupational wages: evidence from Britain", concludes that although there is not an impact at the higher end of the skills spectrum,

"in the semi/unskilled services sector...a 10 percentage point rise in the proportion of immigrants is associated with a 2 percent reduction in pay."

I do not want to overstate it, but there is certainly some evidence that at the bottom end of the labour market, there is an impact on pay. It is also a question of the

[*Mr Harper*]

availability of labour and saying to employers that they need to think about smarter ways of working, not just assume that they can access an unlimited supply of labour.

**James Cartledge:** My right hon. Friend is making a very good speech. On the point of productivity, which he was discussing when my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) and I simultaneously attempted to intervene on him, he will no doubt be as concerned as I am that the productivity figures we have just seen show a heavy concentration of higher productivity in London and the south-east. That suggests to me that the area that has had the highest level of migration and has the highest migration-derived population actually does have high productivity. We have to think about that.

**Mr Harper:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The literature shows that many factors contribute to productivity. To digress for the moment on the regional aspect, which is not too far from the main topic, the strongest action the Government should take is to continue to invest in infrastructure across the United Kingdom, particularly transport infrastructure. One of the reasons for the focus of our former colleague George Osborne, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the northern powerhouse was that if we improved the transport infrastructure to join up the northern cities of England so that people could commute much more quickly between them, we would effectively create a group of cities that together would be globally competitive and would make a real difference to the productivity not just of their region, but of the United Kingdom. Ensuring that we invest in all parts of the United Kingdom and not just in London and the south-east is a valuable point.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): To go back to the right hon. Gentleman's earlier point, is he aware that he has mis-stated the results of the research on the effect of immigration on wages? In fact, the research to which he refers shows a fall of only 1% in the wages of low-skilled workers as a result of immigration, according to the immigration expert Jonathan Portes. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that is the true result of the research that he misquoted?

**Mr Harper:** No, and I take slight exception to being misquoted by the hon. and learned Lady. Some people have misquoted the research, but I have been careful to have a copy of the document in front of me and quote exactly from its conclusion without overstating it. I am familiar with Jonathan Portes' research, but that is different research.

**Joanna Cherry:** Jonathan Portes is an expert in economic immigration. His commentary on the document states that the actual results suggest a fall of only 1% in the wages of low-skilled workers due to immigration. That is Jonathan Portes' expert conclusion.

**Mr Harper:** I am pleased that the hon. and learned Lady has just confirmed that that is Jonathan Portes' opinion about the research.

**Joanna Cherry:** His expert opinion.

**Mr Harper:** I was quoting from the document itself; I carefully explained what it was and read out its precise words. What the hon. and learned Lady has done is read out someone's opinion on it. Jonathan Portes is indeed an economist—in fact, I was debating and disagreeing with him on this very subject on the “Today” programme this morning. Someone may call himself an expert and be an economist, but I suspect everyone here knows that when a number of economists get together, the room ends up with more opinions than economists in it.

**Joanna Cherry** *rose*—

**Mr Harper:** No, I will not give way again yet. I will make some progress.

Much of this debate is about the assumptions behind economic models. Changing the assumptions can often lead to different conclusions. We often hold different views about these things, so we have to make our case with arguments and let our ultimate bosses—the voters—take a view on who they believe. I am content to let them reach that conclusion.

My second point is about migrants' contribution to the public finances. When we came into office, there was a budget deficit of approximately 10% of GDP, which was completely unsustainable. We have reduced that budget deficit by three quarters, but despite the considerable progress we have made, we still have a fiscal challenge to solve. It is important that we look at the contribution made by those coming here.

The Migration Advisory Committee is an independent, expert committee, so I hope the hon. and learned Lady will listen carefully to what it has to say. It did a very detailed piece of work for the Government in 2011, looking at the minimum income requirement for sponsorship under the family migration route. One of its conclusions from the 2011-12 figures was that a household had to earn £25,700 to make a neutral contribution to the public finances—in other words, for the tax it paid to be sufficient to offset its share of public services such as education, health and defence.

That suggests that the migrant workers in Britain who do not earn significant salaries but have access to benefits such as our welfare system are not making a net contribution to public finances. I am not suggesting that they are not working; they are, but they are earning a lower salary and are therefore entitled to things like in-work tax credits and—as the system changes—universal credit. Lower-paid migrant workers are coming to Britain, working, earning money and paying taxes, but the taxes they pay are not sufficient to contribute properly to public finances. In effect, British citizens and those already working here are subsidising some of those migrant workers.

To come back to our friend Jonathan Portes, on the radio this morning he made the point that if we take all EU migrants together, they do make a positive contribution. I have not checked the figures since I debated him, but I think he is right about that. However, he is mashing together all EU migrants of all skill levels. My argument is that we should absolutely continue to have people coming here who are sufficiently highly skilled, are earning income and are making a positive contribution to the public finances, but we should not allow everyone to come here.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he accept what a number of employers have told me: that people who may have entered the UK to fill relatively low-skilled and low-paid jobs in shortage occupations develop and progress their skills in the workplace and make a greater contribution over time to the UK economy?

**Mr Harper:** That may be true, but if the hon. Lady will allow me, I will say more later about what business thinks and about the opportunities that will arise if we make the change I propose. Then, if she does not think I have covered her point, of course she should feel free to intervene.

**Charlie Elphicke:** My right hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. Will he address ensuring that we can end free movement when we leave the European Union and get the right balance with work permits?

**Mr Harper:** Yes, I will come to that.

It is worth saying that Britain's unemployment rate of 4.3% is relatively low, compared with 7.5% in the EU as a whole and 8.9% in the euro area. Some countries in Europe have unemployment rates of more than 20%. Our record is very positive, and businesses have created 3 million new jobs since this Government have been in power. I am always careful to say that businesses have created the jobs, because it does not happen automatically. Although we can help to create the conditions, it is businessmen and businesswomen who actually take the risks and start the businesses. In this country there are still 1.4 million unemployed people, as well as a number of people not in the labour market, to whom we should give opportunities. I think that addresses my hon. Friend's point.

When we leave the EU in March 2019, we will leave the single market and the customs union, and freedom of movement will end. The Government were absolutely right to make a generous offer to EU nationals already in Britain who came here before we triggered article 50. We were not able to make that offer unilaterally, because we had to ensure that we protected the 1 million British citizens elsewhere in the EU, since the British Government's first responsibility is to defend the interests of British citizens, wherever they may be in the world. In the Chamber today, we will debate an Opposition day motion from the Scottish National party that we should unilaterally make an offer to EU nationals, casting aside the essential interests of British citizens elsewhere in the world.

**Joanna Cherry** *rose*—

**Mr Harper:** I see that that point has engaged SNP Members, but we will have plenty of time to debate it later. I mention it now because the Government have published a very clear document for EU nationals called "Rights of EU Citizens in the UK". Every hon. Member who speaks to EU nationals already in Britain should ensure that they see that document, so they know that the Government have made it very clear that they are not just welcome, but positively encouraged to stay here after we have left the EU. If they have been here for five years, they can get settled status; if not, they can stay for that period and then get it. We want them to stay.

My point is about what we do after we have left the EU when new EU nationals want to come and work in Britain. It is worth distinguishing those categories so that there is no opportunity for mischief-making or for anyone to pretend that we do not want existing EU nationals to stay under the Government's very generous offer.

There has been some debate in the media today about our negotiations, but from the document produced by Michel Barnier's team, which sets out the British Government's offer on EU citizens and the demands of the EU27, we can see that we are not a million miles away. There are some issues left that still have to be negotiated on, but on the vast majority there is complete agreement, including residence, exportable benefits and access to the health service. We are within touching distance of reaching a deal on that basis, which will set the mind of many people—EU nationals and British citizens—at rest.

I am also very keen that students keep coming to the United Kingdom to attend our fantastic universities. It is worth mentioning that over the last year the number of international students coming to Britain has increased. Students make very little net impact on the immigration figures because usually they complete their course and then leave; those who want to stay are welcome to do so if they get a graduate-level job, but then they are counted as a worker and not as a student. We have a fantastic offer for international students and I am very pleased that the Home Secretary has asked the Migration Advisory Committee to examine the contribution that international students make to our economy. I look forward to seeing the results of that research.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the University of Gloucestershire has a campus in Cheltenham. Does it not always bear emphasising that our fantastic universities are effectively one of the great exporters in the British economy, because they bring in so much foreign currency? They are one of the jewels in our crown and we should nurture them at every opportunity.

**Mr Harper:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who is not quite, but almost, my Gloucestershire neighbour, for that intervention. He is absolutely right that we have some fantastic educational institutions. In my constituency, Hartpury College is a provider of both further and higher education. It has international students from around the world, particularly on some of its sport courses, and is a global leader. Those are the sorts of educational opportunities that we should be extending; I want to see that continue, and there is no reason why it should not be able to.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am not sure where the right hon. Gentleman got his figures from, but the ones that I am looking at are from the *Evening Standard*. In fact, his former right hon. Friend—the ex-Member for Tatton and former Chancellor—is very worried about the fact that the migration targets include students. He said on 27 August in the *Evening Standard*, "International student numbers are down by 27,000, because we look like an unwelcoming nation". I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has any comment on that.

**Mr Harper:** Well, the figures I looked at suggest that is not true. There has been a small reduction in the number of students coming from the European Union, but that has been more than offset by the number of students coming from outside the European Union. Also, the whole issue of whether students are counted in the migration figures or not is a complete red herring. There is no limit on the number of international students who come to Britain. The only things that students have to be able to do is speak English to an appropriate level, be properly qualified for the course they are taking and be able to pay for that course. There is no limit on the number of students coming here.

Of course, what the Government have done over the last seven years is make sure that students are indeed genuine students, and are compliant with our immigration regime. When we came to power, there were tens of thousands of students who were not really students; they were pretending to be students, but they were actually here working. We have removed sponsor licences from, I think, 916 educational institutions, which were bringing in students but were not complying with our immigration rules. That did no one any favours.

We now have an almost entirely compliant system, in which everybody coming here as a student is a genuine student, does their course and, at the end of it, either goes back to their country of origin or, if they have a graduate-level job opportunity, stays and contributes to our country. They are very welcome to do so. If smart, talented students want to come to Britain and study, I welcome them; if they want to stay here afterwards and take a graduate-level job, I welcome them; and if they want to stay here and start up a business, creating wealth and job opportunities for others, I welcome them. We have seen more people doing those things, not fewer, and I hope that trend continues.

We should base our offer to EU nationals post-Brexit on skills. One reason for that is that there are 1.4 million unemployed people in our country, but there are also some people who do not get the opportunities that they ought to get from employers, because employers are sometimes a little too ready to ask people to come from elsewhere in the European Union to work here.

I am thinking about some of the people who need employers to think about them a little more. There are around a million people in the UK on out-of-work benefits who have some kind of mental health problem but are perfectly capable of working, and who would like to work; some, but certainly not all, of them are included in the 1.4 million people who are unemployed. They may need employers to make reasonable adjustments for them, or they may need some support from the excellent Access to Work system that the Department for Work and Pensions has, but they deserve an opportunity to get into the labour market. We should say to employers, “Before you bring someone in from outside the United Kingdom, you should think a little harder about the people we already have here, and ask yourself if you are doing enough to engage them in the labour market.”

I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on learning disability, but there are also around 600,000 people with learning disabilities in the UK who Mencap estimates are perfectly capable of working, and who would love nothing more than to enter the workforce. Again, they should be given the opportunity to do so, and we should just challenge employers a little to look

at some of the people we have here. I accept they may not be completely job-ready, but I will come back to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke) made about encouraging employers to invest in the skills of employees, so that they get the opportunities to participate. Such encouragement would help enormously.

It is also important that we have an immigration system that commands public support. I was looking at some very interesting work that an organisation called British Future has done. It looked at some of the options that will be in front of us in its report, “Time to get it right: Finding consensus on Britain’s future immigration policy”, which was published in September. The report considered whether we should effectively continue to have free movement, whether we should do what I suggest and have a system like the one we have for migration outside the EU, or whether we should have some other system.

Interestingly, British Future did some polling. I always think that we should not make our policies fit polling, but when we have come to the conclusion that we think is right for other reasons, it is quite helpful and heartening, when one looks at what the public’s views are, to find that actually the public are broadly supportive. When I look at the tables about that polling, I see, first of all, that there is a very considerable consensus, and that people think we should not prioritise business and the economy over immigration, or prioritise immigration over the economy, but that we should have a compromise that balances immigration and the economy. That position commanded very significant support from people, whether they were Conservative or Labour supporters, leave or remain, and men or women, which is encouraging.

The report also considers two options for the Government. One is controlling low-skilled immigration through a cap while allowing skilled migrants to come to the UK, as before. Again, that approach has overwhelming support from a whole range of people, whether they were leave or remain, Labour or Conservative, or whatever. The other option is to consider whether we should have different targets for different types of immigration, and that also commands overwhelming support.

Interestingly, particularly for Scottish National party colleagues who are here, the report also put those questions to voters in Scotland and in London. In Scotland, 62% of voters agreed that we should control low-skilled immigration through a cap while allowing skilled migrants to come to the UK as before, which was far more than the proportion of people who wanted to keep free movement or—at the other extreme—wanted to stop EU migration all together. In London, there was broadly the same figure, with 59% of people wanting to control low-skilled immigration but being very relaxed about higher-skilled migrants, and both those numbers were broadly consistent with those for the UK as a whole.

**Joanna Cherry:** That is, of course, an opinion poll. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the majority of voters in Scotland have voted for political parties that want to keep free movement, and indeed that the Scottish Parliament has recently voted, on a cross-party basis, to support keeping free movement for Scotland and a differential immigration policy for Scotland?

**Mr Harper:** That may well be true, but of course in the referendum on Scottish independence, when Scotland was asked whether it wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, it clearly said that it did, and in the EU referendum the United Kingdom, which Scotland is part of, decided that it wanted to leave the European Union, and the single market and free movement of people. The hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right that I am citing an opinion poll; it is an opinion poll that is not only consistent with the result of the EU referendum, but shows very considerable support for the proposition that I am setting out, so I think that my proposition would command widespread consensus.

**James Cartlidge:** My right hon. Friend is very kind to give way to me a second time. There is one key point I want to raise, because I am not sure whether he will come to it. Were we to bring in such visas or such a system, would he expect that we, our children or whoever would then be subject to similar visas, should we want to visit France or Germany, or work or study in those countries?

**Mr Harper:** My hon. Friend makes some interesting points. He mashed together several things, including visiting and working. I cannot see any reason why, once we have left the European Union, we would require people coming from the EU for visits—people coming on holiday or for travel—to have visas or vice versa. For example, we do not require visas from citizens of the United States of America coming to Britain on holiday or for visits. It is perfectly reasonable to have rules about people coming to work in Britain, and it would not be unreasonable for European Union countries to have similar rules. We could hardly complain if such rules were reciprocal, but to require visas for visits would not be sensible.

The final point I want to make is about the views of business. It is certainly true—I read the paper that the CBI produced ahead of the debate—that businesses, particularly larger businesses, are basically saying, “We want to carry on importing labour as we do already”, but I think we should push back a little. It is not surprising that businesses want to carry on doing things as they are, with unlimited supplies of inexpensive labour, but we should remind businesses that they should not only do what is in their economic interest, but what is in the economic interest of our country. We should challenge businesses to think about those who are already here and ensure they invest in them and improve their skills. We should also challenge businesses a little about whether they are investing enough in their capital, in the technology available to their business and in their productivity before we automatically say, “Let us just import people from overseas.”

The Home Secretary has commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee to look at the businesses that depend on EU nationals in their workforce, and that work will be helpful. It will enable us to identify those businesses that are using that labour, particularly at the unskilled end of the spectrum, and it will enable the Government to work with those businesses, particularly over the two-year transition period or implementation period that we have said there will be once we have left the European Union, during which people from the EU will still be able to come here. In that period we will be

able to work with business to ensure that they can make the changes they need to make ahead of not having access to the unskilled labour that I talk about in my proposition.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman has been making very broad assumptions about who owns and runs businesses in this country. A great number of my constituents who have been in touch with me on this issue have come from other countries to Scotland to set up and establish businesses, but have found that Home Office rules and processes mean that they are then at risk. They employ people from Glasgow, and their businesses are being put at risk by the Home Office, in particular through delays to entrepreneur visas.

**Mr Harper:** The hon. Lady makes a good point, which is that we allow and welcome people to come here to set up businesses with appropriate rules about the investment of capital and so on. If she has any specific cases, she should raise those with either the Minister or my colleague the Immigration Minister. I have done that job, and I used to deal with specific cases. The hon. Lady is right: officials, fabulous though they are, are not perfect and mistakes do get made. Part of what we do in this House is fix those mistakes where they happen. We enable Ministers to ensure that systems work more smoothly, and that work is very welcome. She should continue to raise her concerns, as I know she does.

In conclusion, migration can have a positive effect on the economy, but we should look at the growth of our economy per head of population, and not just at GDP growth overall. We have to ensure that the existing population is better off. People coming to the country should earn enough to make a positive contribution to the public finances. That will support the public perception of migration and make people more welcoming. Finally, a migration system based on skills and not the country of origin will be essential for a global Britain that goes out looking for trade deals. It will be very difficult to explain to countries outside the European Union why a citizen of their country with the exact same level of skills finds it more difficult to come to work in Britain than someone from the European Union. Arguably, that would be a discriminatory system that would be difficult to defend once we are no longer a member of the European Union. For all those reasons, I commend my proposition to the House and look forward to the contributions from other Members.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stewart Hosie (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I note that five Back Benchers wish to speak. Although I cannot enforce a formal time limit, if they can keep their remarks to around five minutes each, the Front Benchers can start at half-past 10.

10.5 am

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I will pick up exactly where the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) left off in talking about the attitudes of business, and I do so in my capacity as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on migration,

[Kate Green]

which recently produced a report on the needs of business for access to labour post-Brexit. I have a somewhat shop-soiled copy here that I am happy to share with the Minister.

In the report, we particularly focused on the views and needs of small and medium-sized enterprises. We felt that their voice had not been heard very much in the debate so far. I put on record my thanks to the Migrants Rights Network, which helped with the research, and Ernst and Young, which provided funding, as well as to all the businesses and organisations that provided evidence. We had evidence from 19 organisations and we held oral evidence sessions with businesses and representatives in London and Manchester covering the retail, hospitality, manufacturing and social care sectors, all of which employ a high proportion of EU and European economic area nationals.

The first thing we were told was that the characterisation of jobs as highly skilled or low skilled and the potential over-restriction of inward migration of so-called low-skilled workers was unhelpful. Many jobs that would not be classed as highly skilled under the 2011 definition that currently applies to non-EU and non-EEA nationals require significant skills and experience. It was inferred that that definition might in future apply to EU and EEA nationals. We know from Office for National Statistics data that non-UK nationals are more likely to be in jobs for which they are overqualified than UK nationals. Businesses saw that as potentially having a positive impact. The issue of skills was therefore complex.

Secondly, businesses said that the description, whether implicit or explicit, of some jobs as low-skilled caused an image problem in some sectors, making recruitment in the domestic workforce more difficult, as it made the jobs unattractive. Thirdly, employers found that migrant workers were often more flexible than UK workers. They described them as highly motivated and hard-working. More to the point, migrant workers were more willing and able to move around the country or work more flexible hours, because often they did not have the same family commitments as UK workers. Indeed, ONS stats show that on average EU2 and EU8 nationals work more hours than UK nationals and so supply important and much needed capacity. Finally, the businesses we spoke to were clear that EU free movement has been an important safety valve for employers in accessing the labour they need. That was especially true for SME employers and sectors where recruitment is more difficult.

Given all those factors, the employers who gave evidence to our inquiry were concerned that immigration policy post-Brexit should not inhibit their access to the labour they need. That concern has been echoed by businesses across all sectors in my constituency, from food processing to paper-making to construction. Flexibility is especially important. In some cases, the need for labour is seasonal, as the Minister knows. Some businesses need to be able to move workers from site to site, depending on where the work arises. I mentioned this in an intervention on the right hon. Gentleman, but employers also spoke about the need for flexibility to enable lower skilled workers to progress and develop higher skills as they progressively acquire experience and knowledge. That flexibility is important in terms of the productivity and progress of the business.

In our inquiry, we asked employers about their preferred model for management of migration post-Brexit. They cautioned against introducing a points-based system similar to the system that applies to non-EU and non-EEA nationals, expressing concern about the cost to employers, the complexity of the system and the bureaucracy. They were worried that such a system would not only limit the number of workers who could come to the UK, but inhibit the flexibility business needed. They were particularly anxious to ensure that any system did not impose unnecessary administrative burdens on employers. They suggested that work needed to be done to identify sectors that were likely to face acute labour shortages in certain skillsets when we can no longer freely access EU labour, and that the shortage occupation list should be expanded if necessary to reflect the new shortages.

The hon. Member for Dover (Charlie Elphicke), who has not been able to stay for this part of the debate, rightly spoke about the need to upskill the domestic workforce. The businesses we spoke to favoured more emphasis on training and upskilling of domestic workers and potential workers, although they also said they thought the existing apprenticeship and training schemes were too inflexible, especially for small and medium-sized businesses. They suggested that as part of the post-EU migration strategy, the Government need to look at developing apprenticeship schemes that more effectively address the labour needs of small businesses. They also asked for Government to provide support for positive efforts in sectors that are considered, often wrongly, to be unskilled and to build a public relations campaign to promote the attractions of working in those sectors. They highlighted in particular the hospitality, food, retail and social care sectors.

I hope the report will be helpful to the Minister in formulating post-Brexit migration policy. The APPG has already had the opportunity to meet the Migration Advisory Committee to discuss our findings. I am concerned that the MAC report commissioned by the Home Secretary will not be with us until later next year. I anticipate that the Government intend to introduce their immigration Bill rather sooner than that, and so will not have the benefit of the MAC research in preparing it. I hope the Minister will say how engagement with business, especially SMEs, will take place in anticipation of the introduction of the legislation to ensure their needs are fully reflected in it.

Finally, we should also be aware that restricting immigration will create other additional and new pressures. We will increasingly have an ageing settled population and a proportionately smaller working-age population; that will lead both to increased demand for labour to care for the ageing population, and to pressures on the supply of labour. As the recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research shows, that will potentially have a negative impact on tax revenues. We must not forget the benefits of immigration. As the APPG's report makes clear, the flexibility, innovation, commitment and ready availability of migrant labour has benefited business and our economy, and it must continue to do so post-Brexit.

10.12 am

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I am thrice blessed—to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Hosie; to follow the hon. Member for Stretford

and Urmston (Kate Green), who made some excellent points; and for the first time to attend a debate to which my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) will respond as Minister. We congratulate her as the first member of our intake in 2015 to have a red box. I am sure she will do the Home Office proud.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on securing the debate. I mean that sincerely, because it is extraordinary how immigration featured so prominently in the referendum campaign but has been barely debated in Parliament since, so I very much welcome this debate. I did not know what the essence of his argument would be, but I have to say I fundamentally disagree with one point that is extremely important and we need to reflect upon it: the point about discrimination and the two different systems that I think will eventually become far more important than perhaps many people realise.

My right hon. Friend is right to say we have a discriminatory system. In fact, the official Leave campaign vowed to end that system. Under our system a person can enter the country to work as an unskilled migrant only from the EU; it is illegal to do so from outside the EU. Tier 3, a form of non-EU migration, is closed and has been for many years. In a written answer, Jacqui Smith said it was because we get sufficient unskilled labour from the EU. The key word is “unskilled”. Some 75% of people who come from the EU to work in this country would not be able to enter under the non-EU high-skilled migrant route. That tells us that the vast majority of EU migrants are doing jobs whereby they would not even be able to get into the country were we to reform the system as suggested. The problem is that the jobs are not menial and unskilled.

I will give the example of a firm in my constituency. Challs, based in Hadleigh, is a chemical manufacturer that exports around the world. It is ambitious, but its owner has said there is a real problem: he has key members of staff who are EEA nationals who are classed as unskilled under the non-EU system, but they are not unskilled and his company depends on them and he would not be able to recruit replacements; it is simply not feasible. We have a significant issue here. I campaigned to remain, but I think the referendum result was driven—quite legitimately—by a concern about unsustainable levels of migration. To honour the referendum result, it is necessary not only to bring about control of immigration, but to reduce the numbers to a sustainable level in the long term.

We have to remember that in the last quarter non-EU net migration was 50,000 higher than EU net migration. If we have a single non-discriminatory system—the same system for EU and non-EU—it is mathematically impossible that non-EU migration will do anything other than rise, perhaps significantly. On the streets of Clacton and other places where the people voted leave in overwhelming numbers, if we had said that a direct result of leaving the EU will be a significant rise in non-EU migration, they would have been shocked and appalled. That is a democratic point that we have to consider. I am a strong supporter of immigration, but it has to be controlled. Consider the people from eastern Europe and the impact they have had: they had a century of brutalisation, but we set them free in 1989; they came into the single market that Mrs Thatcher created and they have worked their socks off in this country.

How do our recycling centres keep going? Almost entirely from east European labour. This is the key point. Would we fill jobs? It is not about what skills are available. It is simply whether we have people available to do those jobs, and people with the will to do those jobs. I agree strongly with my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston that we have to train our own workforce to fill those positions, but it will take time. I remember representatives of the hospitality sector coming to speak to the Work and Pensions Committee when I was on it before the election. They said they supported a greater proportion of workers coming from the UK, but there would need to be a transition.

When I stay overnight in the Park Plaza, I do not see a single British member of staff. They are all from Europe and they work their socks off. They might be unskilled and low paid, but we and our economy depend on them. We have to move away from that dependency, which has become damaging. That is the reality of the position we are in now, so we must be very cautious before equalising the system. In my view, for what it is worth, were we to maintain some form of membership of the EEA and have some form of emergency brake on European migration, such as Liechtenstein has through the European Free Trade Association, and were we maintain the division we have where we are strict on non-EU numbers, we might get a better system, because instead of the Migration Advisory Committee determining the number of people coming into the country, it would be a different system altogether called the free market, which I support. We should be very cautious before changing that.

10.17 am

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is wonderful to see you in the Chair, Mr Hosie. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on securing this debate. I very much welcome the opportunity to speak about the positive contribution that migration makes to the economy, particularly in Scotland. As you might expect from an SNP MP, Mr Hosie, I will focus my remarks today on this Government’s obsession with an unrealistic and counterproductive one-size-fits-all net migration target, which I believe is deeply flawed in economic terms.

It is important to set the scene and provide a bit of context for this debate. Scotland’s estimated population was 5.4 million in mid-2016—the highest on record and an increase of 6.7% since 2001. Net migration has contributed to a population increase every year for the past 16 years. In contrast, the rate of natural change has remained low for the past 50 years, and over the past two years has been negative. That contrasts with the situation in the UK, where natural change contributes significantly more to population increase. Migration has therefore been critical to growing Scotland’s population, and any reduction in migration has the potential to seriously damage Scotland’s demographic resilience.

Looking ahead, Scotland’s population is projected to increase by 5% by 2041, driven solely by migration. Scotland has a markedly different demographic profile from the rest of the UK, which is why I believe immigration policy should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, a topic I will return to later. If current trends continue, net inward migration is projected to be the sole contributor

[David Linden]

to Scotland's population growth. EU migrants make an enormous contribution to our economy in Scotland, so I am especially fearful about the consequences of restricting free movement in a post-Brexit Britain.

I was recently out in Glasgow enjoying a dinner and was struck that from the moment I entered the hotel to the moment I left, every single member of staff I came across was a European national. That echoes the point made by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) only a few moments ago. The reality is that our tourism sector is heavily and increasingly dependent on workers from other EU countries. According to the annual population survey, in 2016 there were approximately 17,000 EU citizens working in tourism in Scotland, representing 9.4% of all those working in the sector overall, with that share rising to 15.3% in the accommodation sector specifically. That compares to an EU citizens' employment share of 5% in the Scottish economy as a whole.

We know that the UK Government's position on EU citizens in the Brexit process is already having a detrimental impact on flows of inward migration. For example, the number of nurses from the European Union registering to work in the UK has fallen by 96% since the Brexit vote last year. Figures collated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council show that the number of new applicants from the EU fell from 1,304 in July last year to just 46 in April. If that does not cause us concern, I do not know what will.

**Mr Harper:** I was trying not to intervene because I did speak for a fair length of time, but just to be clear: there are more EU nationals working in the NHS this year than last year. There were 61,891 EU nationals working in the NHS in June 2017, compared with 58,698 in June 2016. The idea that after the referendum decision all the EU nationals working in the NHS went away is simply not true.

**David Linden:** Those figures will presumably include doctors; the figures that I quoted are from the Nursing and Midwifery Council. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to conflate the figures, that is absolutely fine, but that is where my figures are from.

Restrictions on migration will also have an impact on Scotland's soft fruits sector—a vital part of our rural economy. That impact will be of interest to you, Mr Hosie, and to the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who I presume will speak about it as well. It is vital that our sectors retain the ability to recruit staff from across the EU. We know that 15,000 non-UK seasonal workers are employed in our soft fruit and vegetable sector, so that should be a cause for concern as we approach leaving the EU.

Before summing up, I want to focus on calls—not from the Scottish National party, but from civic Scotland—for immigration powers to be devolved. We know that the one-size-fits-all approach to which the Government are wedded will not work for the future sustainability of our economy.

**Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con):** There have been a number of suggestions about having a separate immigration policy for Scotland and England, but there is of course

no border there. Countries like Australia, for example, have separate states with separate immigration policies. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that creates issues, with leaks of migrants across the states?

**David Linden:** Given the mess that the United Kingdom Government are currently in regarding the situation in Ireland, I am not sure that a Member from the governing party lecturing us on borders necessarily suggests the right frame of mind at the moment.

The calls for immigration to be devolved do not necessarily come from the SNP, although we support them; they come from civic Scotland. Let me quote Grahame Smith, head of the Scottish Trade Union Congress, who I believe was right to say:

“We believe migration has an entirely positive contribution to make to Scotland's economy, demography and culture, particularly in a properly regulated labour market in which workers' rights are protected.”

He went on to say:

“UK immigration policy is increasingly encroaching on the devolved powers of the Scottish parliament, including how it runs its public services and who works within it.”

Grahame Smith is right: immigration powers must be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. We in the SNP believe that migration is about more than economics. It is about individuals and their families having the right to choose to build their lives in Scotland. It is about the contribution that they make to our culture, communities and society, as neighbours, friends, family members, and work colleagues. That contribution will be lost if people from the EU are no longer able to come here.

10.23 am

**Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con):** It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) for introducing such an important debate on the future of migration after Brexit.

Since being elected, I have heard concerns specifically from soft fruit farmers across my constituency about how we will continue to provide for seasonal agricultural labour after we depart from the European Union. In Angus, we produce over 30% of Scotland's soft fruit, and I am incredibly proud of my many constituents who collectively deliver such a significant contribution to our vital food and drink sector. As I set out in my submission to the Migration Advisory Committee last month, Angus requires an excess of 4,000 seasonal workers every year to make that vital contribution to our economy. I will continue to urge the UK Government to provide clarity on how they will field those much-needed staff going forward.

Labour accounts for approximately 50% of a soft fruit farm's costs. If there are further declines in the numbers returning to the United Kingdom, overtime payments will be essential to cover the hours of work required to complete the production process. I am deeply concerned that those higher wage overheads will put pressure on the price for our consumers. If the cost of our fruit increases, I am anxious about not only competitiveness with outside markets, but the possible implications for the ability of consumers to afford our produce.

Many colleagues on both sides of the House will have similar issues in their constituencies; I hope that they, too, take this opportunity to work constructively with the Brexit process, rather than heckle from the sidelines. I know that behind the scenes there is a power of work is going on in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Home Office to ensure a viable solution after Brexit, but I hope that the Minister can give some reassurance to my constituents that they will be told how they can continue to grow their great British businesses as we depart the EU, sooner rather than later.

10.25 am

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and to see the two rapid-risers of 2015 and 2017 on the Front Benches. I want to touch on three separate issues, the last of which has already been extensively discussed: curry, students and fruit-picking. The metric I want to use is how much those sectors contribute to our economy, through productivity and other means.

Let us start with curry. I am a product of that industry as my father had two Indian restaurants. It was the late Robin Cook who said that chicken tikka masala is now the national dish, not fish and chips. Chinese and Indian restaurants combined contribute £5.5 billion to our economy—employing 250,000 people—but since the Government started meddling with the tier 2 visas, we hear that two Indian restaurants a week are closing in this country. That is on the eve of small business Saturday.

In all three areas, there is a theme: a dogmatic target—tens of thousands, just for the sake of it—can lead to skills shortages and gaps in our labour force that need to be addressed. If we are wedded to that ridiculous target, we have no room for manoeuvre. I think the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) were making the same point: inflexibility is hamstringing our economy.

We now have several world-class, Michelin-starred Indian and Chinese restaurants. We could introduce a system of temporary visas, like the seasonal agricultural workers scheme for fruit-picking, for bringing people in and out to do those kinds of job. I wonder whether the Minister might be able to do a review—they are always popular—on how to alleviate those shortages. The curry colleges that Eric Pickles, no longer a Member of the House, suggested have been a complete flop. The idea was to train curry chefs here, but that is just not happening.

To add insult to injury, the Leave campaign used the hashtag #saveourcurry. I think it was the former Secretary of State for International Development, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), who said that if we stop EU migration, the curry chefs will be welcomed in with open arms. I remember querying that in Home Office questions, during my brief time at the Dispatch Box. I was told, “No—the target remains the tens of thousands.” The curry industry was hoodwinked, which was really unhelpful, and now feels very cheated.

It is time to get rid of the arbitrary target altogether, but students should certainly be taken out of migration figures. The general public at large do not see them as

immigrants, because they are here temporarily; I think Home Office figures show that 97% of them go back after their studies. They contribute £10 billion per year to our economy and this is a huge export industry. There are many advantages to having students, such as the contribution they make to our soft power, and to having international staffers come to our universities, including the University of West London in my constituency.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Huq:** I am sorry; I would have done so earlier, but I have only one minute left to conclude.

Hon. Members have already mentioned fruit-picking. We need a stable and predictable flow of people to stop our fruit, hops and vegetables rotting away in the fields. The National Farmers Union—not the Socialist Workers party—has said that there is an urgent labour crisis in that sector. We had that workers’ scheme from 1948 to 2013. The agriculture industry is worth £3 billion to the UK, and it relies on a seasonal workforce. As the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) said, indigenous people do not want to do that work—that is why it is not happening. I would urge the Minister to reintroduce that kind of scheme. There are academic studies from the University of Sussex, but again we see dogma trumping reason, with a counterproductive result. Attracting Brits is difficult.

The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean mentioned settled status. Members of the 3 million campaign—my constituent Wiktor Moszczynski is very vocal in that—do not like what they are being offered. They think it is a lesser status and a secondary tier. They have lost their rights to family reunification, appeal rights, protection from deportation—the list goes on. It is seen as not really satisfactory.

We need some flexibility. The fixed target is unmet, unachievable and unrealistic. George Osborne says:

“Advanced nations that have shut the door to newcomers now find themselves ageing fast and shrinking as a presence in global affairs—whereas those with open societies maintain a big role in shaping the world we live in.”

I did not used to agree with him when he was in here, but I agree a lot more with him now he is out at the *Evening Standard*. I will end there!

10.31 am

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the chair and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. It is also a pleasure to welcome the Minister to her place. We may disagree about politics, but I have always found her unerringly professional and courteous in her approach.

We have had a very interesting debate today, but these debates should be evidence-based. I want to start by taking the opportunity to correct for the record what was said by the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on Sir Stephen Nickell’s research. I quote from an article published in *The Independent* on 25 January 2017 following an interview with Sir Stephen Nickell, where he said that his work had been misrepresented by those who wished to slash immigration:

[*Joanna Cherry*]

“The author of an influential piece of economic research frequently heralded by leading Brexiteers as evidence that immigration from the European Union undermines native British wages has stressed that the negative impact is ‘infinitesimally small’ and that his findings had been widely misrepresented.”

Sir Stephen’s research, originally published in December 2015, is frequently cited by those who are

“asked to provide evidence that immigration has had a negative effect on...living standards”

in the United Kingdom, yet

“the 10 per cent claim was based on a significant misunderstanding of the research’s findings. As...Jonathan Portes has pointed out, the actual results suggested only a 1 per cent fall in the wages of low-skilled workers due to immigration—and this impact was spread over a period of eight years.”

That is 1% spread over eight years.

Sir Stephen said that his research had been “grossly misrepresented”, that the wage impact is “very small” and that low-skilled workers

“lose out by an infinitesimally small amount.”

He said that he was cross that he had not been able to get cross in public about the

“public bowdlerisation of his research findings”

because he was a senior official at the Office for Budget Responsibility until recently, and added that

“his co-author, Ms Saleheen, who works at the Bank of England, has also been unable to speak out publicly to correct misleading statements.”

I am pleased to quote from the horse’s mouth—the author of the research—that the research has been misquoted, and from Jonathan Portes, who is not a self-appointed expert, but a professor of economics and a widely recognised expert on immigration.

**Mr Harper:** I was very clear in what I said. I agree with the hon. and learned Lady—I do understand that some people have misrepresented what Professor Nickell said. I read from the conclusion of the report, which said that the 10% increase in the proportion of labour led to a 2% reduction in wages. I did not overstate it. I do understand that some people have exaggerated that, and I was very careful not to do so, because I take what economists say seriously.

**Joanna Cherry:** I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says and I am happy to have had the opportunity to clarify the matter.

What I really want to speak about is the evidence of the impact of immigration on the Scottish economy. It is increasingly clear that UK immigration policy does not and cannot address the demographic and social needs of Scotland. If that continues to be the case, the Scottish economy will be adversely affected. The contribution of citizens from the European Economic Area to Scotland has recently been addressed in detail, with substantial evidential analysis, by the Scottish Government, in their response to the Migration Advisory Committee’s call for evidence on the role of EEA workers in the UK labour market. I commend that to the Minister. It shows that EU migration in Scotland is essential to ensure sustainable population growth, which is the single biggest driver of our economic growth.

All the projected increases in Scotland’s population over the next 10 years are projected to come from migration, in contrast with the UK as a whole, where only 54% of population increase is expected to come from overseas migration. That is why Scotland needs a different immigration policy and why the Scottish Parliament has voted to support the Scottish Government’s policy of a differential immigration policy, although it is a matter of regret that the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats did not support that. I am very pleased to say that the Labour party and the Greens did.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) said, the Scottish Government also have the support of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. In particular, Unison has spoken out strongly about the need for a differential immigration policy for Scotland. I am also pleased to say that the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scottish Institute of Directors have said that Scotland should look closely at a differential immigration policy.

To address the point about borders raised by the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), Australia and Canada are two examples of countries that operate differential immigration systems. As the hon. Lady ought to know, because it is her Government’s policy, immigration is not controlled so much at borders these days but in the workplace, when people go to look for a job or a benefit, or go to rent a flat. In Scotland, we now have a separate national insurance code, so it would be easy for Scotland to have a differential immigration system from England without any need for a hard border. Indeed, we are repeatedly told by the UK Government that the Republic of Ireland can have a separate immigration policy from the north of Ireland without the need for a hard border.

I am constrained by time, but I want to look briefly at the macroeconomic modelling that has been done by the Scottish Government, because it shows the contribution of EU migrants to the Scottish economy: on average, each additional EU citizen working in Scotland contributes a further £34,400 per head in gross domestic product per year. As there are approximately 130,000 EU citizens working in Scotland, that means they are contributing approximately £4.42 billion per year to the Scottish economy. It is also estimated that, fiscally, they contribute £10,400 per head in Government revenue. So, the evidence shows that EU and EEA migrants are making a huge contribution to the Scottish economy.

With regard to migration from outside the EU, we do not think a one-size-fits-all approach applies either. We would like the UK Government to abolish their net migration target, which, let’s face it, they have missed for the past seven or eight years, so there is not really much point in it anyway. We would like them to abolish the immigration skills charge. We would like a more flexible and responsive approach to the existing mechanism of the shortage occupation list for Scotland, and most importantly—this has cross-party support from every single political party in Scotland—we want the post-study work visa introduced in Scotland. I would really like the Minister to tell us why the post-study work visa has not been reintroduced in Scotland, despite the support of her own party in Scotland for that to happen. We are often told how tremendously influential the Scottish Conservatives are now at Westminster. If that is so, let

us see the post-study work visa come back, because the Scottish National party has been calling for that for a long time.

Immigration policy must be evidence-based. When we quote evidence, we have to look at it carefully to make sure that we understand it properly. If we are in any doubt about the conclusions, we are perhaps best to go back to the author of the research, as I have done with Sir Stephen Nickell.

As regards Scotland, the evidence shows that the Scottish economy benefits from immigration. Business in Scotland accepts that, the trade unions in Scotland accept it and most of the political parties accept it. It is time for immigration policy to be devolved to Scotland so that the Scottish Parliament can ensure that migration works to the benefit of the Scottish economy.

10.39 am

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on securing this debate, and I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I welcome the Minister to her position, and I look forward to our exchanges. I was an immigrant, but I am an adopted Mancunian and I am here representing Manchester, Gorton.

The Government's migration policy is not driven by economics. Since 2010, the focus has been on meeting the net migration target, whatever the cost—and there certainly has been a cost. One of the first groups they went after was students. International students contribute £25 billion to our economy. They are also an easy target for reducing migration numbers. Students are the largest group in the net migration figures, and the numbers for that group are easier to control than for other forms of migration. Attempts to reduce international student numbers have worked: 72 British universities have lost more than 43,000 international students over the past five years.

**Mr Harper:** With the greatest respect, the Government have not gone after students at all. There are more international students here. What the Government have done is to tackle colleges that were pretending to educate people who were actually working. We have taken away their sponsor licences. We actually have more genuine students studying here than we did—I welcome that—but it is not right that people come here pretending to be students when they are really working. We have got rid of that abuse.

**Afzal Khan:** I have no problem with stopping abuse, but if the right hon. Gentleman will hear some of my further arguments, what I am trying to say may become clearer.

**Carol Monaghan:** What we have seen in Glasgow is not a drop in the number of international students, but a change in the demographics. Whereas in the past we had students from India, the States, Australia and New Zealand, now the majority of our students come from China. They come and study, and are welcome—we love having them—but they leave immediately after finishing their course. We want them to stay and help improve the economy, but we need the post-study work visa in place for that to happen.

**Afzal Khan:** I thank the hon. Lady for that contribution.

Let me make progress on my point. Those students would have supported about 24,000 jobs and brought £920 million-worth of positive economic impact to those universities and their local economies—50% of the jobs would have been in the local economies and 50% in the universities. International students pay higher fees and subsidise UK higher education spending. Students not only benefit local economies but have a lasting impact on our links with other countries. They increase our soft power abroad: 55 world leaders from 51 countries have studied in the UK.

Research is a major reason why the UK is attractive to investors. International students go on to fuel innovation and research. I am from Manchester, and graphene—a wonder material—was discovered at Manchester University. The two professors who discovered it were migrants. They won Nobel prizes, and we will continue benefiting economically from their discoveries. International students have also been shown to benefit the UK students who study alongside them.

Despite all those benefits, the Government made it more difficult for students to get visas, which discourages them from staying in the UK. The Government have chosen their misguided net migration targets over the benefits students bring to local economies. Their approach to EU nationals is already making skills and labour shortages worse. The NHS, nursing and social care are being hit. Those sectors face a crisis. The Government have used EU citizens as bargaining chips in negotiating with the EU. EU citizens are still waiting for clarity about their rights 18 months after the EU referendum. The number of EU nurses registering to work in the UK dropped by 96% in the year since the Brexit vote, and staff shortages in social care are causing homes across the country to close.

This issue does not just affect the public sector. The Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the British Chambers of Commerce have all said that we will need more migrant workers, skilled and unskilled, in the years ahead. Despite the rhetoric that immigration policy will attract the brightest and best, we are losing out on skilled workers. The Government's distinction between skilled and unskilled workers makes no sense. Apparently, to be a skilled worker, a person must earn at least £35,000 a year, but people in a number of skilled occupations earn less than that, including non-medical nurses, many teachers, language teachers and engineers. Outside London, many people earn less than £35,000. A tech genius in Manchester is likely to earn less than she would in London, but that does not mean she is any less skilled.

The Government asked the Migration Advisory Committee to investigate immigration policy and our economy, but it seems that the Government will publish the immigration Bill before the Committee publishes its advice. What could be a clearer sign that immigration policy is not guided by economics? The Government are already planning to ignore the advice they requested.

When the Government draft the immigration Bill, will they ask businesses what they need, and will they seek input from unions? Will they examine the impact that their own austerity policies have had on access to the NHS, schools, housing and public services? Will they take account of the fact that the Migration Advisory

[Afzal Khan]

Committee missed the nursing shortage altogether, and that it was the Secretary of State for Health who had to lift the visa restriction for nurses?

Labour has promised fair and reasonable management of migration. We will always put economic prosperity first. We will scrap the meaningless and unworkable migration target, which has never once been met in seven years. The reality is that the target for non-EU migration alone, which the Government are solely in charge of, has never once been met. Labour would not include international students in the immigration numbers. We will work with employers, unions and others to establish our real needs and meet them. We want fairness between EU and non-EU migrants. That means levelling up decent treatment and establishing fair rules. We will crack down on all exploitative employers who deny rights and breach national minimum wage rules. Migrants make a great contribution to this country, to our social and cultural life, and to our economy. Tory rules are an obstacle to maximising those benefits.

10.47 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and to appear opposite the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan). I welcome him to his place. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) for this important, topical and genuinely interesting debate. It is so important that we have this debate now. As we move towards leaving the EU, we begin to formulate ideas and plans for our future, not just in the European area but in the world as a whole. As a former Immigration Minister, my right hon. Friend's expertise and experience precede him. He spoke with clear authority and eloquence—particularly about the issue of skills and productivity. I found his submissions about GDP per head very interesting. I hope those sorts of ideas will come to the fore as we debate the future of immigration in this country.

My right hon. Friend and a number of other hon. Members rightly mentioned students. The Government absolutely believe that our world-class educational establishments are a major success story for the United Kingdom. There is no limit on the number of international students who can visit. International students are included in the net migration figures because the independent Office for National Statistics follows the policy of Australia, the United States and other countries, which also include those figures in the net migration statistics. It is worth bearing in mind that when students leave the United Kingdom, they are taken out of the net migration figures.

**David Linden:** May I press the Minister on the point about the post-study work visa made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)? The Conservative education spokesperson in the Scottish Parliament, Liz Smith MSP, made comments about, and was hoping to see action on, this issue. Will the Minister give us an update on the post-study work visa before she moves on from education?

**Victoria Atkins:** The hon. Gentleman has pre-empted me; I was going to deal with that at the end, but I will deal with it now. We have no plans to reintroduce the post-study work visa. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) was quite right to talk about evidence, and I thank her for her kind comments, but evidence from previous schemes showed that large numbers of people were undertaking low-skilled work. We now have the much more targeted tier 2 scheme, so that when graduates leave UK universities we know that they go into highly skilled jobs, using the skills that they have developed at university. Indeed, the evidence goes even further: we found that in October 2010, three in five users of the post-study work visa were in unskilled work. A 2014 analysis of migrants who had switched from the tier 1 post-study work category to the tier 1 entrepreneurial category found that the majority had no declared economic activity or were working in breach of their conditions of stay. That is why we are focusing on skills and productivity—precisely because we hope that students who come to our universities will deliver those skills and will be able to contribute.

I am conscious of time, so I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to this debate and I reassure them that the Government are clear that carefully controlled economic migration benefits our economy. It is vital for our country's prosperity that we select and attract the right mix of skills to the UK, ensuring that we continue to support wealth creation, employment and productivity. We know that migration supports United Kingdom growth by allowing employers greater choice and enhancing the labour market's ability to respond quickly to capacity constraints. I listened carefully to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) on the concerns of local employers. I hope that the independent Migration Advisory Committee report will draw on those views, so that in September 2018 we will have an evidenced-based report on what our migration system should look like.

Migrants do not just bring the skills needed but enhance our society and contribute to British life. However, we must strike a balance. We need to attract migrant labour, which boosts our economy, while ensuring that migration does not reach unmanageable levels to the detriment of domestic labour, skills and local communities. Our commitment to reducing net migration to sustainable levels must be balanced by our determination to ensure that UK businesses have the labour force that they need. Our immigration system must strike that balance.

I was most interested to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), particularly as she is the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on migration. She mentioned skills; in setting in our immigration policy we have followed the advice of the independent Migration Advisory Committee, particularly when it comes to drawing up the shortage occupation list. Again, we will look at the evidence of the committee's report in September 2018.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West both mentioned Scotland having its own immigration system. I make the simple point that the United Kingdom is united: there is free movement between England, Wales and Scotland. The whole point of

having a united immigration policy is to keep our kingdom united. I know that that does not play with the views of the—

**Joanna Cherry:** Will the Minister give way?

**Victoria Atkins:** Will the hon. and learned Lady forgive me if I do not, as I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean wants to speak for two minutes at the end? I just wanted to make the point that we have freedom of movement in the United Kingdom.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) for raising the issue of agricultural workers. That is being kept under review, and the Immigration Minister is visiting many members of the agricultural sector to discuss those concerns. We note in passing that the latest labour market statistics from the Office for National Statistics show that more EU nationals are coming to this country to work than ever before. That is why we have not implemented a seasonal agricultural workers scheme, but that is kept under review and we will listen carefully to the National Farmers Union and others.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) mentioned curry, students and fruit picking. We have already dealt with fruit picking, but I am delighted that she raised the subject of curry. Curry chefs are not subject to the freedom of movement rules that EU chefs enjoy. We do not want to discriminate between non-EU and EU migrants. There will be a system for all our international partners. I make no promises as to how that will impact curry chefs in particular, but the point is that we will be free of that current difference between EU and non-EU citizens because we are leaving the European Union.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West spoke about the post-study work visa issue; I have already answered that point by way of an intervention. We continue to review our immigration arrangements regularly, and we are committed to ensuring that the system continues to serve the national interest.

Very quickly, on the point about the immigration Bill and rules, which was raised by a number of hon. Members, the MAC report is due to report in September 2018. The immigration Bill will be drafted before then; it will be about dealing with the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill repealing freedom of movement. The detail of EU migration policy that will apply to EU nationals will be set out in immigration rules. The report is a very important part of creating those rules. I hope that the Bill will come next year; it will set out the framework within which those rules will work.

Mr Hosie, I want to give my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean time to make his closing remarks. It has been a pleasure to listen to this debate

and to the informative contributions; they have made for a very interesting morning. Allow me to finish with this thought: we all know that successful businesses are essential to the success of our economy. It is through successful businesses that we have employment, pay packets and prosperity, which is precisely why the Government established its immigration policy, and measures such as its modern industrial strategy and flexible working arrangements, through universal credit for example. I hope that that will have an impact on bringing people into the job market. All those policies draw together to try to ensure that the United Kingdom remains a great place to do business. We welcome the contribution that migrants have made historically, and will make in future.

10.58 am

**Mr Harper:** I am grateful for the opportunity to sum up the debate. To come back to what my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) said, part of the reason for this debate was to kick off the discussion. I am grateful for the views that colleagues have given. I am very conscious that all the debate about migration so far has been about the existing EU nationals in Britain and our British citizens overseas. That is very important, but it has rather obscured the question of what we will do after we leave the European Union. That is exactly why I called this debate. Clearly, it will not be the last debate, but the first in a series. It has brought out some of the issues and has enabled us to have discussion. What has come through very clearly—this is supported by the polling that I quoted from *British Future*—is that the public want us to balance the needs of the economy and the requirement to control migration. They do not want us to prioritise one issue over the other; they want to balance them, and getting that balance right is important.

I have set out a proposition, and the Minister can listen to that. The Migration Advisory Committee is doing work to inform the debate, and colleagues on both sides of the House and from all parts of the United Kingdom will bring valuable insight. That was my intention. We have had an excellent debate, with contributions from many parts of the United Kingdom and from both Front Benches, and I am grateful for those. I am sure that this will not be the last time that we debate this important subject, and it was a great pleasure to do so under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the effect of the Government's migration policy on the economy.

## Arctic Ambassador: Appointment

11 am

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the appointment of an Arctic ambassador.

It is an immense pleasure—indeed, an honour—to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I welcome the Minister. He indicated that this might be his first Westminster Hall debate in his present post, so I congratulate him on that.

I am delighted to introduce this debate on an issue that is close to my heart. Scotland is the Arctic's closest neighbour, and the potential for collaboration and mutual learning between us is significant. That is why I have championed closer political engagement with the Arctic countries for some time. As a member of the all-party parliamentary group on polar regions, I want to take this opportunity to credit the APPG for its work in this regard.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about the APPG on polar regions, which I have the great honour of chairing. It covers both polar regions—the Antarctic and the Arctic—so will he explain why this debate is about an ambassador only to the Arctic? Surely, if we were to have an ambassador or a special envoy, they should be for both the Arctic and the Antarctic.

**Douglas Chapman:** The chairman of the APPG makes a valid point. However, as I will reveal, the proximity of the Arctic to Scotland makes Arctic issues much more relevant to our Government in Edinburgh and to our interests. I recognise, however, that the Antarctic plays a significant role overall and has similar issues, especially with regard to climate change and the environment, as the hon. Gentleman alludes to.

I thank Members who supported my recent early-day motion calling for the UK Government to appoint an Arctic ambassador. The reasons for my pursuit of this matter are manifold. Climate change is one of the greatest threats we face. As we know, its impact is felt most keenly in the Arctic north, where the melting of sea ice is accelerating at an alarming rate. In summer 2016, we saw the second lowest minimum ice extent on record in the Arctic ocean. The melt season has been lengthening, too. For example, the duration of ice-free conditions between the East Siberian sea and the western Beaufort sea increased by nearly three months between 1979 and 2012.

We must not underestimate the impact of what is happening in the High North and its inevitable effects on the rest of the world. Geographically, Scotland is the Arctic's closest non-Arctic neighbour; the northernmost part of Scotland is closer to the Arctic than to London. I was delighted to be able to attend the Arctic Circle forum last week in Edinburgh, which was co-hosted by the Scottish Government. The forum served as a platform to spell out the plethora of ways in which Scotland can work with our Arctic partners for mutual benefit. Our geographical similarities and our shared challenges in areas such as the environment, living in remote communities, fisheries, planning and tourism were all brought to the fore. We also share many cultural and historical ties.

For example, the twinning arrangement between my home town, Dunfermline, and Trondheim in Norway was the first in Europe. Our links go back a long way.

I will focus on the following areas of mutual interest between us and our Arctic neighbours, although this list is far from exhaustive: energy, transport, tourism, design and innovation, and defence. Energy is an area in which Scots have much to offer. The development of renewable energy in Scotland is forging ahead, and the capacity of renewables is set to increase. The world's first ever floating wind farm was recently launched in Scotland, demonstrating our innovative approach to renewables on a global stage. At the Arctic Circle forum last week, we heard from Neil Kermod, managing director of the European Marine Energy Centre, who recounted Orkney's renewables success story. Those islands have been producing more than 100% of their energy from renewables since 2013, and one household in 10 generates its own power.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will my hon. Friend join me in acknowledging the fantastic contribution from Heriot-Watt University in my constituency to the development of renewable technology in the Orkney Islands?

**Douglas Chapman:** Exactly; I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that intervention. I will mention later the collaboration that we seek with all academic institutions. All the universities in Scotland were represented at the conference last week.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Given that the majority of policy areas related to the Arctic and the High North, and to the boundaries with the United Kingdom, are predominantly devolved to our Parliament in Holyrood, does my hon. Friend agree that there needs to be more joint work and collaboration, and that the United Kingdom Government need to recognise the expertise in Holyrood and in the Scottish Government?

**Douglas Chapman:** My hon. Friend makes a really valid point. During the independence referendum, Scotland was asked to lead the UK, not leave the UK. That kind of argument makes it important that Scotland's position and expertise, and the valuable contribution we can make to Arctic issues, are brought to the fore.

Orkney also has the highest uptake of electric cars in the UK. There are clearly lessons to be learned across borders in a region with some of the greatest potential for renewable energy in the world.

Although we are making huge leaps in harnessing wind and tidal power in Scotland, we still mainly use fossil fuels to heat our homes and businesses. Many other, more niche renewable energy sources, such as geothermal, can be exploited. Geothermal energy is already being used to heat homes in parts of Glasgow, which begs the question, how can that be expanded to other areas? That takes me to Iceland, which is a world leader in geothermal power. Where better than our near neighbours to seek guidance on further developing that form of energy in Scotland?

As sea ice coverage in the Arctic reduces, opportunities might open up for new global trade shipping routes, and those could be supported by Scottish ports. The Northern Isles, the Western Isles, the Moray firth and

my home port of Rosyth are some of the locations identified as potential stop-offs for such shipping. To prepare ourselves to ensure that we have the capacity to exploit those opportunities, we must consider what investment is needed in new port infrastructure. The Scottish Government are already investing in land-based shipping infrastructure; national planning framework 3 considers opportunities for new and expanded ports at Scapa Flow, Stornoway, Shetland and the Moray firth. The hub port of Finna fjord in Iceland has undergone a transformation in recent years to enable it to take full advantage of new shipping routes opening up across the region, so we can look there for inspiration.

We also have great potential to attract the cruise industry to the north. Scotland is well placed to embrace the economic opportunities presented by that expanding global market; it already attracts 45% of passenger day calls across the UK. At the Arctic Circle forum last week, we heard from Domagoj Baresic, a polar research and policy initiative fellow at University College London, who believes that Scotland could become a hub for the cruise liner industry. Let us not allow that golden opportunity to pass us by.

Besides attracting cruise liners to Scotland's coast, there are plentiful opportunities for smaller-scale blue growth through marine and coastal tourism. At the Arctic Circle forum, Giancarlo Fedeli spoke about the success of his Cool Route project, a sailing route with more than 300 stops along the coasts of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the Faroe Islands and Norway. That cleverly mapped-out route has the benefit of sustaining small coastal enterprises, often in remote communities, and helping them to extend their market reach. Cool Route has been ranked the No. 1 most adventurous cruising route in the world.

To give another example, North Coast 500 in the Scottish highlands successfully attracts tourism to remote areas. However, that project has taught us a valuable lesson: maintaining the integrity of our natural resources is part of the challenge of sustainable tourism. Iceland has that particularly in mind, given the rising popularity of its stunning Blue Lagoon as a tourist hotspot. Like Iceland, Scotland is home to some of the world's most beautiful scenery and natural wonders, which attract millions of visitors to our shores every year. We must ensure that those valued resources are protected so that they can continue to be enjoyed by Scots and tourists alike for generations to come.

**James Gray:** The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way. I, too, am a Scot, and of course Scotland has a great deal to offer both the north and the south and elsewhere. I am puzzled, however, by his logic as to why Scotland having nice scenery should somehow or other lead to the conclusion that there should be an Arctic ambassador—which, after all, is what the debate is about.

**Douglas Chapman:** I think it fits perfectly. There is a need for an Arctic ambassador—I will cover other areas in my speech. It is crucial that we make these links and have these friendships and collaborative projects across the whole of the Arctic. I know the hon. Gentleman has a wide range of interests, so I ask him to open his mind to the possibilities if we were to have an Arctic ambassador fighting for the UK and for Scotland over a wider range of issues.

We must ensure that all our resources are protected so that they can continue to be enjoyed by Scots and visitors alike. That is why the Scottish tourism agency signed a memorandum of understanding with Iceland's tourism board last year. There is room for wider collaboration across the Arctic region on marine and coastal tourism. It is in our stewardship and sometimes our care for sensitive areas that Scotland can influence others.

An area of a mutual interest between the UK and the Arctic that does not spring immediately to mind is social policy. That said, I was hugely impressed by the Arctic conference and the innovative ways in which some speakers identified collaborative approaches towards things such as health, housing and planning. I was blown away by the cutting-edge approach taken by Lucy Fraser of Albyn Housing Society and Matt Stevenson of Carbon Dynamic towards health and housing in the context of Scotland's ageing population. They have been working together on a project to design high-tech, low-energy adaptable housing units complete with state-of-the-art wellness sensors that can monitor a resident's health and potentially predict changes—for example, falls—before they happen. Already, they are collaborating with northern universities on artificial intelligence used in the oil industry to help to develop their design. Their vision of Scotland as a global leader in predictive health is truly awe-inspiring. Again, to answer the point made by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), this is about working in collaboration with other Arctic states, not narrowing our vision just to environmental issues.

Another pioneering initiative showcased at the Arctic Circle conference was that of Lateral North, a Glasgow-based design agency run by two creative young people who specialise in collaboration aimed at redefining Scotland's relationship with the Arctic north and our Nordic neighbours. It uses virtual and augmented reality technology to map out ideas across areas such as town planning, tourism and shipping. A recent project saw it working with the Anchorage Museum in Alaska, engaging with indigenous communities to tackle societal challenges through urban planning, architecture and design. It sees Alaska and Scotland—the relationship between them—as the two gateways to the Arctic and the north. This is about how we can capitalise on that unique approach; it is a really inspirational project.

I appreciate that some areas I have mentioned are devolved either partly or in full. The Scottish Government deal with the devolved issues, but the major reserved area for the UK Government in terms of the Arctic is defence. The retreat of sea ice and the Arctic opens up commercial opportunities, but also increases the risk of military conflict in the region. We have seen recent submarine activity in Scottish waters, which is reaching levels beyond even what we experienced during the cold war, with Russia increasing its military footprint in the region. Members will also be aware that NATO has recently announced the formation of a new command to protect sea lines of communication between North America and Europe. That presents the UK with a unique opportunity to make representations to our NATO allies to base the new maritime command in Scotland. I call on the Minister to address that.

The Scottish Government recognise the geopolitical importance of the new north and have taken what steps they can to formalise our willingness and eagerness to

[*Douglas Chapman*]

work with Arctic nations. In 2014, the Scottish Government and the European Policies Research Centre hosted an international conference on regional co-operation in the Arctic. In 2016, the First Minister made a keynote speech at the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik and, as I have mentioned several times, we hosted the Arctic Circle forum in Edinburgh a few weeks ago. As well as issuing a Nordic-Baltic policy statement, Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for external affairs, announced at the closing session of the conference that the Scottish Government would seek to develop a new Arctic strategy.

I warmly welcome the moves Scotland is making towards closer collaboration with our northern neighbours, given the range of devolved issues at stake. However, foreign affairs remains reserved to the UK Government. It is therefore vital that those sentiments are mirrored here in Westminster to ensure we have a consistent approach over all Arctic issues. By appointing an Arctic ambassador, the UK Government could signal their intent to work more closely with the Arctic countries on areas of mutual interest. That would also provide greater focus on British-Arctic affairs, allow for greater scrutiny and co-ordination of policy development in this area, and provide a platform for initiating trade missions to the region and work on energy projects. All that is even more important in the face of a hard Brexit, which could damage our economic links with many of our neighbours to the south. That is why now, more than ever, we should be encouraging the UK to look north.

For me, the key message of all this is one of collaboration. By working together, sharing our experiences and learning from one another, we can achieve great things. The many similarities that we in Scotland have with the countries of the Arctic make Scotland well placed to engage a multiple-level approach, but we need the UK Government to support and complement that engagement.

The appointment of an Arctic ambassador is not a novel idea: France, Japan, Poland and Singapore all have ambassadors responsible for Arctic affairs. All eight Arctic states also have Arctic ambassadors, special Arctic envoys or special representatives. The UK is clearly lagging behind in that respect. I suggest we follow the example given by the House of Lords Arctic Committee, which in 2015 recommended that the UK appoint an Arctic ambassador. I urge the Government now, at this critical time for our future relations with other nations, to take heed and give serious consideration to the appointment of an Arctic ambassador, even if that means allowing Scotland to take the lead in the UK, or for the UK, on the issue.

I thank the Minister in advance for his response, which I am sure will be well considered, and I would welcome further opportunities to discuss this matter with him in greater detail. Mr Hosie, I hope you have a wonderful day.

11.17 am

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) for securing the debate. The United Kingdom has a long history of involvement in the Arctic. As Minister for the polar

regions, I welcome this opportunity to set out the Government's approach to the Arctic and the steps we are taking to ensure that the United Kingdom remains active and influential there. I will also respond to the specific question of whether we should appoint an Arctic ambassador, but first I will set out the context in which our Arctic policy is based and the extent of our work on the Arctic.

The Arctic is changing rapidly. The effects of climate change are perhaps more visible there than anywhere else on the planet. Temperatures there are rising twice as fast as at lower latitudes, and we are already seeing the dramatic impact of that across the northern hemisphere in a growing number of extreme weather incidents. Within the region itself, declining levels of sea ice are attracting greater economic activity. There are opportunities for the UK, but equally, we must take our obligations seriously to ensure that only responsible development takes place in the Arctic.

Our Arctic policy is set in that context of a rapidly changing climate, which means that the co-operative approach we have always taken is now all the more important. The UK has a prominent voice in all international organisations with a role in the governance of the region. We are rightly seen by the Arctic states as a reliable and pragmatic neighbour. That means working with all the countries that have a stake in the Arctic—the main eight are labelled as the Arctic states—and we do that principally through the Arctic Council, at which we have held observer status since its inception in 1996. We enjoy excellent economic ties with Arctic states, which are enhanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk) in his role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to the Nordic region.

A co-operative approach is the right basis for ensuring that we can continue our long record of involvement in the Arctic, particularly as more nations declare their Arctic interests. It underpins our ability to conduct pioneering scientific research and to make the most of any economic opportunities that may arise, while taking due account of our environmental responsibilities. The UK has consistently been at the forefront of international regulatory developments that aim significantly to reduce the risk of Arctic pollution. We maintained strong involvement in finalising the environmental aspects of the polar shipping code and the ongoing discussions regarding the impact of black carbon emissions on the Arctic.

A central strand of our policy is to continue to support the Arctic research of our world-renowned scientists. Only three other countries—the US, Russia and Canada—produce more Arctic science papers than the UK. The Government are supporting pioneering Arctic research in a number of ways: first, through increased diplomacy and exchanges, including recent visits to Arctic states by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's chief scientific adviser, Robin Grimes; secondly, through the strengthened Arctic science office of the Natural Environment Research Council, which is giving more support to UK Arctic science; and thirdly, through our network of science and innovation officers in our embassies in Arctic countries, who are increasing their engagement in the Arctic Council's working groups and have helped to promote the UK's scientific excellence in Arctic science.

As the Arctic itself is ever changing, so too must our policy adapt and change. I am therefore pleased to announce that we will renew our Arctic policy framework early next year. We intend that to be an evolution, not a revolution, and we will reaffirm our commitment to partnership and international collaboration in the Arctic. Our vision remains one of a safe and secure Arctic that is well governed in partnership with indigenous peoples and in line with international law. The new framework will remain a cross-government document and will take account of the views of the devolved Administrations. I saw the Scottish Government's recent announcement that they intend to develop their own Arctic strategy. I trust it will be in line with the UK's framework and focused on their areas of competence.

As I hope everyone agrees, the UK can be proud of the positive role we are playing in the Arctic. None the less, having carefully considered the arguments set out today, I do not believe that appointing an Arctic ambassador, as some countries have done, is the right approach for the UK. Given our wide diversity of interests and established engagement across the Arctic states and within the Arctic Council, we do not think that it would add value. As Minister for the polar regions, I am already supported by a senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office official who oversees the development and implementation of the UK's Arctic policy framework, chairs the cross-Government Arctic network and ensures the UK has appropriate representation at the Arctic Council and other key international Arctic events.

I am not convinced that the appointment of an Arctic ambassador would add significant value to existing structures and roles or justify the additional costs involved. We believe that the existing structure of Government, working properly at official level, does the job. I hope everyone agrees that the UK has been a prominent voice in Arctic affairs for many years. The Government are determined to maintain that level of interest and influence. The arrival of new interested parties, such as Asian nations, challenges us all to ensure our voice is heard just as prominently. We will continue to make the most of new opportunities for co-operation and to encourage our scientists, businesses and non-governmental groups to continue to pursue their interests in the Arctic.

Climate change means that international co-operation will be more important than ever. We want to ensure that the Arctic remains a place of peace and stability, and we will continue to work in partnership with all of those who have interests in the Arctic region.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.24 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Legal Aid

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the provision of legal aid.

Thank you, Mr Robertson, for calling me to move the motion in this critical debate on legal aid provision in the United Kingdom. As ever, it is an honour to serve under your chairmanship.

When people lack the money or knowledge to enforce their rights, those rights are worth nothing more than the paper they are written on. It is unacceptable that, in 2017, justice is fast regressing to a system that is not served to all, but instead belongs to those with the deepest pockets. Failings in the legal aid system are taking away people's ability to defend their rights in practice, which is creating a system where a person's income or economic status is a key determinant of whose rights matter when they are most needed.

That increasingly worrying situation is the result of a conscious political choice to restrict access. Just as the Labour party was founded more than a century ago to give working people representation in Parliament, legal aid was introduced by Clement Attlee's pioneering Labour Government in 1949, alongside the pillars of the welfare state, to rebalance the scales of justice. The principle underpinning its creation was the belief that every person should have equal access to, and protection under, the law, regardless of financial position or social status. That was, and still is, a key way to support our ambition for a fairer society.

Since then, legal aid has been a lifeline for the vulnerable. It has funded action to stop justice being available only to the privileged few in a wide range of areas, from housing and family break-ups to benefits assessments. As Lord Bach stated in a Fabian Society investigation of the state of legal aid, which was recently commissioned by the Labour party:

"We will all lean on the law at some point in our lives... an effective legal system in which all can access justice fairly is the cornerstone of a free society...The law guarantees our rights, underlines our duties, and provides an equitable and orderly means of resolving disputes."

But in all parts of the UK it is becoming harder and harder for the poorest people to access justice. Access to legal aid lawyers continues to become ever more difficult, with the Law Society warning of "legal aid deserts" where there are no legal providers, or just a sole legal provider, for whole regions.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the number of legal aid providers has fallen by 20% since the Government changed the eligibility criteria?

**Mr Sweeney**: Absolutely. I will refer to that statistic later. It is a shocking indictment of the cuts and the attrition of the access available to the weakest in our society, who rely on that point of contact and are otherwise shut out of the legal system altogether. Where in

[Mr Sweeney]

our country someone lives should never affect their ability to access justice, but it does, because of the wide variation in availability of legal aid providers.

Legal aid is often a lifeline, particularly for women, when the case is domestic violence, family law or employment tribunals on equal pay, unfair dismissal or discrimination. In my constituency and across the country, it is clear that we need to relearn just how critical legal aid is as a cornerstone of a civilised society. Although Scotland has a distinctive legal system within the United Kingdom, the Law Society of Scotland recently raised concerns about the sustainability of the legal aid system there, stating that, in particular,

“current rates of payment for legal aid work risk making the provision of legal services to some of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society”

simply “uneconomical”. We already know that gaps are developing in the provision of legal aid in parts of Scotland, and we must work hard to stop those gaps growing. The Law Society of Scotland also said that a lack of investment in legal assistance had made it

“increasingly difficult to maintain a sustainable, high-quality legal assistance system”

across Scotland. It urged crucial investment to halt the ongoing real-terms decrease in legal aid funding.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the Scottish Government’s review of legal aid? The legislation is 30 years old, and the Government now seek to ensure that full access to public legal aid continues.

**Mr Sweeney:** I think we both recognise that the situation in England and Wales is much more acute than it is in Scotland, but none the less, there are challenges facing the legal system in Scotland. I welcome that review and I hope it will take into consideration the financial constraints that legal aid provision in Scotland has faced in recent years, and take heed of what the Law Society of Scotland has urged.

To look back at the wider issue, an increasing lack of funds across the UK means that a growing number of solicitors will be unable to take on legal aid cases. The report “The financial health of legal aid firms in Scotland” of February this year found that those relying on legal aid might soon be unable to find a solicitor because many law firms simply cannot afford to carry out legal aid work.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and giving us a chance to intervene or speak on the subject. On average, since 2011, Northern Ireland’s annual bill for legal aid has been in excess of £102 million. Does he agree that, as we live in an increasingly litigious world, legal aid must be available to support those who have been wronged and cannot afford redress? Does he further agree that we must ensure they have protection? Protection is what they need, which is why they need legal aid.

**Mr Sweeney:** I agree. The fundamental, critical point of judgment on this is equality of access, not necessarily cost. Cost is a secondary consideration. Access is the

fundamental right that all should be entitled to. That is the challenge we face, whereby some of the smallest legal aid firms are carrying out legal aid work at a loss and are at serious risk of not being able to offer legal aid work at all. Civil legal aid solicitors are paid for only approximately two thirds of the work they carry out, and criminal legal aid solicitors are paid for only three quarters of the work they carry out.

As if that were not bad enough, we have seen even greater ravages to the system in England and Wales following the cuts made by the Tory Government. That has taught us what happens when access to justice is removed from people in our democracy: further inequality, marginalisation of the most vulnerable, a self-defeating increased cost to the public purse and a fundamental impact on our society.

Access to justice has been seriously undermined by the Conservative Government, with hundreds of thousands of people unable to afford to defend their rights following savage cuts to the legal aid budget as part of the 2012 reforms, where the introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012—LASPO—left many vulnerable people unable to defend themselves in areas as fundamental as housing, employment, immigration and welfare benefits. We have seen not only a decline in access to legal aid providers, but, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), the number of providers cut by a shocking 20% in just five years, and a limiting of the scope of legal aid itself. It has been an all-out assault on justice.

This summer’s Supreme Court ruling that the Government acted unlawfully by imposing employment tribunal fees underlines just how far they have gone in restricting people’s access to justice. We have a Tory Government attacking people’s living standards and, at the same time, deliberately undermining their ability to defend themselves from those very attacks. It is a cynical, Kafkaesque nightmare perpetrated on the poorest. Britain’s most senior judge, Lord Thomas, has said:

“Our justice system has become unaffordable to most.”

Amnesty International’s 2016 report, “Cuts that hurt: the impact of legal aid cuts in England on access to justice”, states:

“Cuts to legal aid imposed by this Government have decimated access to justice and left thousands of the most vulnerable without essential legal advice and support. We are in danger of creating a two-tier civil justice system, open to those who can afford it, but increasingly closed to the poorest and most in need of its protection. From parents fighting for access to their children, to those trying to stay in the country they have grown up in, and to people with mental health problems at risk of homelessness, these cuts have hit the most vulnerable, the most.”

LASPO removed whole areas of law from the scope of legal aid and drastically reduced the percentage of the population eligible for the legal advice service and representation that still exists. Spending has fallen from £2.2 billion to £1.62 billion per year. As a result, the number of civil legal aid cases, which was 573,744 in the year to April 2013, has now fallen to a shocking 146,618 in the year to April 2017. In some regions the fall was even greater. For example, in October *The Independent* reported:

“Legal aid cuts have triggered a staggering 99.5 per cent collapse in the number of people receiving state help in benefits cases”

with just 440 claimants given assistance in the last financial year, down from a massive 83,000 before the £1 billion of cuts imposed by the Tories. That is absolutely shocking.

One of the Government's stated aims in no longer funding lawyers for low-income couples arguing over divorce or child arrangements was that that would encourage them to seek mediation instead, but the Government have acknowledged that the opposite has happened, with mediation numbers falling off a cliff and a huge rise in people attempting to navigate the family courts with no lawyer or legal representation. Even more appallingly, not a single person with a discrimination complaint was referred to see a legal aid lawyer in the last year, as *BuzzFeed News* revealed just last week.

During a time of austerity, it is fanciful to believe that the decline in numbers reflects reduced demand. This is a deliberate effort to exploit the weakest in our society and deny their access to justice.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, first for his securing the debate, and secondly for making such a passionate case. The reality is that professional, useful advice for vulnerable people is decreasing—not only through the diminishing of legal aid, but with citizens advice bureaux being threatened with closure, such as in my constituency. These people need help, and we have a responsibility to them to devise a system that will give them that help.

**Mr Sweeney:** Absolutely. Wherever vulnerable people in our society turn, they are increasingly finding impediments and blockages placed in their way. That is increasing all sorts of problems and harms that people in society face, including mental and physical health problems.

Although many people have decided to give up pursuing a legal case because of the cost, even where legal aid remains in scope, many now represent themselves in court, as has been mentioned. Since LASPO, for the first time, more than half of parents—58%, many of whom were mothers from poor backgrounds—went to court without a lawyer to fight their case.

As we all know, in many walks of life, spending money early on leads to savings down the line. It was therefore very depressing to observe cuts falling particularly hard on services that help to advise whether someone has a case and how to proceed in the first place, which can prevent problems from escalating. Increasing funding would be a money saving measure, but instead, as so often, the Government, who profess their fiscal prudence, end up throwing good money after bad in their obsession with destroying the fabric of our public realm.

The Government are reviewing LASPO, and we urge them to guarantee the reintroduction of legal aid for early advice from a lawyer as part of that review. Restoring early legal advice would not only help to resolve many legal problems, but would save taxpayers' money by reducing pressures on the courts and elsewhere. In October, the new President of the Supreme Court, Lady Justice Hale, described LASPO cuts as "a false economy", and said that early legal advice would help to resolve many legal problems and save money by reducing pressure on the courts system.

As the Law Society explained this week, early legal advice helps to address problems before they escalate. For example, in housing law, although legal aid is still available to defend possession proceedings, that is only when the loss of a home is imminent and the landlord has sought an order for possession. A lack of early legal advice can create unnecessary costs for the taxpayer due to cases going to court that could have been resolved earlier. Worsening legal problems can also create other knock-on effects and costs to the public purse, potentially causing issues such as poor health, homelessness and debt.

Early legal advice is vital in housing law. For example, a lack of early advice on minor disrepair issues can mean problems such as faulty electrics or a leaking roof escalating, potentially creating health, social and financial problems, as we most appallingly saw earlier this year with the Grenfell Tower disaster. Early legal advice is also important in family law, but is no longer available in family breakdown and child custody cases. Because of that, mediation referrals have plummeted, putting pressure on courts and therefore on public finances. A Citizens Advice study estimated that for every £1 of legal aid spending on housing advice, the state saved £2.34; for every £1 spent on debt advice, it saved £2.98; and for every £1 spent on employment advice, a massive £7.13 was saved.

The Labour party is seeking to repair the broken justice system to ensure that people can defend their basic legal rights. One of the first acts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) as Labour leader was to support the establishment of a commission on access to justice, made up of legal experts and chaired by Lord Bach, whom I mentioned earlier. Over nearly two years, the commission heard from more than 100 individuals and organisations with special expertise in all parts of the justice system. The commission proposed, among other measures, the return of legal aid in some areas and increasing the availability of early legal advice.

There is much in Lord Bach's report that the Government could implement ahead of the next general election if they were serious about restoring access to justice. Labour's 2017 general election manifesto committed the party to

"immediately re-establish early advice entitlements in the Family Courts",

which includes protecting children from harm and most domestic violence cases. The Government should do the same.

The Government must use their review of LASPO fundamentally to repair the damage caused by their legal aid reforms since 2012, rather than simply to apply a sticking plaster to what is, it is increasingly apparent, a broken system. They should also use the review to look at restoring legal aid for early legal help on housing and welfare benefits. Opposition Members also urge the Government to review the legal aid means tests, including the capital tests for those on income-related benefits.

In Scotland, we need to continue pushing to ensure sufficient resources for legal aid providers, so that provision is maintained. That includes challenging the long-term underfunding of the system, and the modernisation and streamlining of legal aid, to ensure that access is available to any citizen in need of its support. My constituents,

[Mr Sweeney]

and people across Scotland and the rest of the UK, must be able to have confidence in our legal systems and must be confident that the social status or wealth of an individual cannot usurp the most basic concepts of right and wrong.

2.44 pm

**Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) for securing the debate. May I also compliment the Labour party on introducing legal aid 68 years ago? It has been of great benefit to many over that 68 years and continues to be so.

Here in the United Kingdom, we are rightly proud that everyone is equal under the law. Across the United Kingdom, our separate legal systems are united by the common principles of fairness, equality and respect for human rights, which have made the British justice system respected worldwide. Legal aid is crucial to ensuring that our justice systems live up to those principles. Without it, access to justice would become the preserve only of those who can afford it.

Legal aid is there to ensure that as many persons as practicable, regardless of their ability to pay legal fees, which can be very expensive, have access to fair representation in a bid to obtain their legal rights. That is why our legal aid system must be sustainable and up to date, and I for one am pleased that the UK Government recognise that and have reformed legal aid in England and Wales to modernise it and to put it on a secure financial footing for the future.

United Kingdom spending on legal aid massively outstrips the European average; it dwarfs that of most European nations and is, surprisingly, above France's and Germany's.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The hon. Gentleman is comparing apples and oranges. The legal systems in France and other European countries are different from the adversarial system we have here. It is probably not fair to compare only legal aid budgets, without looking at overall justice costs.

**Bill Grant:** The hon. Gentleman may well be right. The fact is that we spend more per head than Germany, but I accept that that there are other considerations to take into account.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an error by reading out the Minister's speech from the LASPO Bill's Committee stage five years ago. What he says is no truer now than it was then. He should be looking at the effects of legal aid cuts, not the incorrect predictions made at the time the legislation went through Parliament.

**Bill Grant:** I note the hon. Gentleman's comments on the decisions on cuts. They adjusted the system. It is a suitable system, which still remains, and I am sure many people will continue to benefit from legal aid.

As has been said, legal aid is devolved in Scotland and decisions on its provision are quite rightly the Scottish Government's to make. Funding for legal aid was £138 million in a previous year; it is now down

slightly by some millions, but it is fair to say that, per head, Scotland's legal aid spending is broadly in line with the UK Government's spending in England and Wales. When the Scottish National party came to power in Holyrood, Scotland's legal aid system was 20 years old, as the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) said. Ten years on, that system is 30 years old, and it now needs to be looked at, as I am sure he would agree. After a decade of SNP rule, and despite the enactment of the Legal Profession and Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 2007, Scotland's legal system would benefit from further reform.

It is true that we have seen some change, such as the court decision that prompted the Scottish Government to reconsider its Ministers' decision not to exercise discretion to provide legal aid to an alleged victim of domestic abuse who sought to oppose attempts to obtain her medical records. The Scottish Conservatives had repeatedly asked for that change, to bring Scotland into line with England and Wales, but the Scottish Government repeatedly refused until the courts forced their hand. They were then slow to act: only in February did they finally see fit to launch a review of the Scottish legal aid system, which I commend. I hope the Scottish Government act soon and follow the UK Government's lead in making legal aid sustainable, modern and fit for the future.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that the Scottish Government should follow the UK Government's example by removing family, immigration, housing and welfare cases from the scope of legal aid? He cannot possibly think that that would be a positive development.

**Bill Grant:** It will be entirely up to the Scottish Government to decide what course they take.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair):** Order. It is my intention to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.28 pm, which hopefully will allow two minutes for Mr Sweeney to respond. If hon. Members keep their speeches to five or six minutes, that will enable me to call everyone who attempts to catch my eye.

2.49 pm

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on legal aid, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on securing the debate. Mindful of your guidance, Mr Robertson, I will minimise my comments on the detail of what has happened to legal aid provision since LASPO was introduced.

The position was summarised very well this summer in the Law Society's report, "Access Denied?", which said that legal aid is no longer available for those who need it, that those eligible for legal aid find it hard to access, that wide gaps in provision are not being addressed and that LASPO has had a wide and detrimental impact on the state and on society. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East explained how the scale of the reductions in legal aid provision has worked out in practice. We know that the total number of matter

starts for legal aid and controlled legal work fell from 933,815 cases in 2010 to 147,107 this year. That is a staggeringly precipitous fall in provision.

Although this debate is rightly about legal aid, it is worth mentioning the wider context. Legal aid sits alongside the provision of wider advice services, many of which were funded by local authorities, and in many cases there was co-provision of such services in the same premises. Because local government has had a 40% fall in funding in recent years, mainstream advice services and other forms of early help have also taken a significant cut. As my hon. Friend said, and I am sure everyone who contributes to the debate will say, it is often the most vulnerable people who experience the most deleterious consequences—people who are suffering from mental health problems, people who have language difficulties, people who are extremely stressed as a consequence of debt, benefit difficulties and impending homelessness. They need that assistance, but it has not been available.

I have one of the largest constituency caseloads involving disability benefits in the country. Often it is not understood that this is an inner-London issue, but it very much is. Those of us who have a significant welfare caseload in our constituencies have seen in particular the consequences for people who are losing their employment and support allowance, have lost their disability living allowance or are making claims for personal independence payments. They have found it extremely difficult to get not only early help but representation and advocacy to get their benefits restored, despite the well documented evidence that such early assistance significantly improves a claimant's chances of being successful at appeal.

The local advice agencies in my area draw a clear line between the lack of early help, the consequences for people losing their benefits and the direct rise of dependency on food banks. There has been a 56% rise in the number of cases going to my local citizens advice bureau—often cases that previously would have been picked up by early legal help—and my food bank in north Paddington has seen a doubling of demand for its services. Those things are connected. In my borough, there has been a 93% fall in family legal help cases; a 26% fall in housing legal help; a 51% fall in housing certificated assistance, despite a sharp rise in homelessness, in common with many other local areas; a 100% fall in welfare; a 99% fall in debt advice; and a 46% fall in the number of solicitors' firms taking on cases. In common with many Members of Parliament, I have experienced a sharp rise in the number of people who are coming to me and to local councillors to seek the kind of legal help that they are no longer able to get because of the fall in legal aid provision.

Today's debate is very well timed, with the announcement that the post-implementation review is under way. As has been referred to, the Law Society's report on early help came out this week. I am sure I will not be the only one to reference and give huge credit to the Willy Bach commission report, which sets out a comprehensive analysis of what has happened since LASPO was introduced. I hope the work of the Law Society and the Bach commission will inform the Minister's review.

I have few questions for the Minister about the post-implementation review; it will be helpful if he can provide answers. What reassurances can he give that the post-implementation review will be thorough? The memorandum to the Justice Committee says it will be thorough,

but we want to know what that will mean. Who will be on the advisory panels? Will the thorough work and consultation necessary to make this a meaningful review take place before Parliament rises for the summer recess next year? How will the review be conducted? Who will be consulted and how? Will there be written and oral evidence?

On early advice, we know about the impact of the reduction in numbers on the sustainability of practitioners. Ministry of Justice figures indicate that the total number of not-for-profits with legal aid contracts has fallen from 870 to 95 post-LASPO. That is a drop of 89%. Can the Minister assure us that, whatever the outcomes of the post-implementation review, there will be enough providers to pick up any additional provision of advice? Do the Government know how many people will be available to deliver legal aid after the changes are made? Many areas are now advice deserts, with law centres and practitioners having had to close. Who will provide this advice and what is the Minister doing to ensure there will be a flow of lawyers into an increasingly stressful and under-resourced legal aid service?

The Government say that the exceptional case funding system is a safety net. When it was discussed in Parliament, we were told that 5,000 to 7,000 cases per year were expected. In fact, the number of cases has been extremely limited. How will the Minister review that and ensure that exceptional case funding is adequate for purposes?

How will the shortfall in county court offices since their reduction be met? County court offices used to be able to assist not by giving legal advice, but at least providing some support—for example, if someone was applying to suspend a warrant, they could obtain the form and get the application listed through the county court. Now, many court offices are open for very limited hours or just for appointments, and that is another hurdle. Is the Minister aware of that, and can he give us some reassurance?

Finally, on the promises to improve the service for victims of domestic violence, we know that reforms have been thrashed out and that Ministry of Justice staff and family groups have been working on it. The Government have admitted that changes need to be made to protect those suffering domestic abuse, but that has been delayed for a number of months. Can the Minister tell us when those changes will be brought in?

2.57 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) and my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on legal aid. They have set out some of the facts and figures that show the astonishing decline in the availability of legal aid since the enactment of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, and I will not repeat those.

I had the pleasure—if that is the right word—of leading for the Opposition, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the noble Lord Bach, during the year-long Committee stage of the LASPO Bill. It was pretty obvious then what the consequences were going to be, but we do not have to predict now; we have seen those consequences. That is why I was quite surprised to hear the hon. Member

[*Andy Slaughter*]

for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) repeating the shibboleths that we heard at that time: that this was just bringing us into line with what happens elsewhere, and that these were perfectly reasonable and affordable cuts. The figures we have seen show that the contrary is true.

In the other place, I think there were 11 defeats and three tied votes, all of which unfortunately were substantially reversed in this House. That was a significant indication of the level of concern, even while the Bill was going through Parliament. Were it not for the extraordinary discipline of the Liberal Democrats—this is possibly the only issue that all Members here will agree on—there would have been many more defeats, and we might have stopped some of these cuts going through. The Liberal Democrats turned out night after night to vote for legal aid cuts in the most stringent terms and ensure that those changes went through, with better discipline than the Tory peers, and we will continue to remind them about that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East said, that was a sea change. It was reversing the legal aid policies put forward by the Labour Government of 1945 to '50. The Bill at that time made legal aid permissive. In other words, legal aid was available, except where the legislation said that it was not available. LASPO completely reverses that and says that one has to define exactly the very specific means by which legal aid is made available. The net result is not only that in many areas, particularly of social welfare law, legal aid has been withdrawn specifically, but that in reality it has been withdrawn entirely, because neither the voluntary sector nor private practice can continue it with what meagre fare there is to allow it to operate. Many areas of the country have become advice deserts.

**Ian C. Lucas:** To pick up on the advice deserts point, during my 16-year parliamentary career, the Ministry of Justice and the local justice departments have very much moved away from their local communities and are now incredibly distant from the communities that they served. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to localise provision in a much better and more responsive way?

**Andy Slaughter:** My hon. Friend knows that very well from his professional background. I entirely agree with him and will say in a moment what I think should be done to reverse what he describes, but while we are diagnosing the problem, I must point out that there has been an extraordinary effect on the advice sector and on the courts. Indeed, we can see it in our surgeries. I do not know about other hon. Members, but I now provide 20-minute appointments, and often that is not long enough to see constituents. I refrain, not having a practice specifically any more, from giving legal advice, but that is in effect what people are coming to ask for, whether in areas of family law, immigration, employment or housing. Those are not the sorts of complaint or issue that I remember dealing with 10 years ago. These people have come, possibly as a first port of call, to Members of Parliament—research has shown that this is the case—simply because there is nowhere else to go.

Let me use the example of my constituency. Many of our advice agencies—such as Threshold, which provides specialist housing advice, and the Shepherd's Bush advice

centre—and many of the specialist agencies dealing with specific communities have simply closed down. I am very lucky, in that I have an extremely supportive council. Labour took power again in 2014, and it is now rehousing and properly funding the Hammersmith law centre, which I have had the pleasure of being on the board of for some 30 years. Therefore, along with the citizens advice bureaux, some good provision remains in the area, but I suspect that it is the exception rather than the rule.

I pay tribute not only to Members of the House who have taken an interest in the subject, but to the practitioners out there in the country. My law centre is watched over by Sue James, who was legal aid lawyer of the year after 25 years of practice and setting up other law centres in London. It is the dedication of people such as her, Carol Storer of the Legal Aid Practitioners Group and Nicola Mackintosh that has in effect, despite the Government's best efforts, kept the legal aid system going in this country over this period. However, it is absolutely at breaking point.

I therefore have something to ask of the Minister, who is an intelligent and fair man and knowledgeable in these areas, when he does the review, but let me just say this about the review. It is being done at the last possible moment, and possibly beyond the last possible moment, because if I remember correctly, the undertaking given during the passage of LASPO was that the review would begin within three to five years. I think that the end of the five years will be next April and that the review is not starting till the summer, so we really are squeezing it into the last minute. I hope that it will be a proper review and that it will look in particular at the Bach commission report, because that is an extremely thorough report by the people in this country who probably best understand the issue and the problems that arise. I hope that it looks across the board at what needs to be done—not just, as we have heard, at early advice and the restoration of legal aid, particularly in areas of social welfare law, but at the means test, at the system for contributions and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) said, at the localisation of services, because nothing is really working at the moment.

We need a root-and-branch review, and fresh legislation may well be required. Unless the Government are prepared to look at the matter with fresh eyes, instead of taking the blinkered approach that was taken with LASPO, it will be not only bad for my constituents and those of other hon. Members present, but bad for the system of justice in this country, because the courts are not functioning properly. Litigants in person are flooding the courts, and there are delays throughout the system. The compound effect of cuts in the legal aid system and the Courts Service over the past five years is that we can no longer say that we have a system of justice of which we can be proud, and I greatly regret that.

3.5 pm

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. As a former employment rights lawyer, I am passionate about legal aid and access to justice. Many of my hon. Friends have made important points about the need for increased access to justice. Coincidentally, yesterday I chaired a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party's Back-Bench

justice group on this very subject, drawing particular attention to the measures outlined in the Bach commission report, which aims to redress the injustices caused by LASPO.

I am firmly of the view that the abolition of legal aid for early advice is a false economy. It means that far more cases end up going to court that should have been resolved earlier. My experience as a lawyer was that when I gave clients clear legal advice from the outset about their prospects of success, they were far less likely to pursue an unmeritorious claim through the courts. The removal of legal aid for early advice has caused a clear and undeniable increase in the number of people representing themselves in court.

National Audit Office figures and research by the Law Society show a staggering 30% increase in litigants in person in family court cases. In that emotive area of law, litigants in person often result in longer hearings and in victims of domestic violence having to face their abuser in court. Moreover, the failure to provide early legal advice can have significant knock-on effects for other departments and the public purse. For example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) said, the cost of someone being evicted because they have not had access to housing legal advice at an early stage is far greater than the cost of the advice itself. That is not to mention the societal impact.

However, I want to use this opportunity to talk about legal aid for inquests. A number of my hon. Friends will be aware of, and indeed many of them have signed, early-day motion 498 on this important matter, which I tabled. It calls for legal aid to be provided to the family of the deceased in all cases in which the state is funding one or more of the other parties. Inquests have never fallen into the main body of legal aid provision. Legal aid for inquests is available only at the discretion of the Legal Aid Agency under the “exceptional case funding” provisions introduced by LASPO. Exceptional case funding is available for categories of law that are not ordinarily in scope of legal aid, and where failure to provide legal services would breach an individual’s rights under the European convention on human rights, or other enforceable EU rights relating to the provision of legal services.

However, exceptional case funding applications are complex and time-consuming. Lawyers receive payment for an ECF application only if it is successful, and although the Legal Aid Agency will accept applications from applicants in person, very few are made and even fewer are successful. In addition, the definition of exceptional case funding does not provide an adequate safety net for inquests, as an applicant has to show that there is an article 2—right to life—issue, or a wider public interest in legal aid being granted.

The Law Society’s “Access Denied?” publication drew attention to the case of five-year-old Alexia Walenkaki, who died of head injuries while playing on a swing in the children’s play area in a London park. The swing was suspended from two tree trunks when one of them toppled over on to the child. Alexia’s mother applied for exceptional case funding in order to be represented at the inquest. However, the application for legal aid was refused by the Legal Aid Agency on the grounds that it did not meet the LASPO requirement that the representation be in the public interest, despite the fact that the case involved consideration of a local authority’s responsibility to ensure safety in a public area.

Legal aid for inquests is even more important, as most bereaved families will not be able to afford private legal representation, particularly for lengthy inquest hearings. Most recently, the Hillsborough inquiry shone a light on this important issue, calling for families to be fully involved in inquests, and for equality of arms, so that no one is under-represented in these critical types of cases.

The Bach commission report acknowledges that access to justice is lacking in this area and that reform is urgently needed. I tabled early-day motion 498 on legal aid for inquests as I believe the Government should take urgent action in this area, and provide access to justice for bereaved families by providing crucially needed legal aid to the family of the deceased in all cases where the state is funding one or more of the other parties. I urge Members from across the House to sign the early-day motion.

3.10 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Mr Robertson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on securing it.

To get perspective on the problem of access to legal aid, we first need to remind ourselves that the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 came in as one of the Labour Government’s swathe of measures to help alleviate poverty in the welfare state following the 1945 election victory. Over the years, scope was increased to keep up to date with social developments, but over the past 25 years, we have seen a gradual erosion of legal aid, culminating in a full-scale attack on it via the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, or LASPO, to give it its shorter name.

Let us be under no illusions: LASPO was introduced under the cloak of austerity to cut the legal aid budget. To that extent, it has succeeded, cutting the total spend on legal aid from £2.499 billion in 2010-11 to £1.554 billion in 2016-17: a cut of £945 million, or 38%, to give the percentage total. Taking areas such as some family law and welfare law out of scope is having a devastating effect on some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Couples who split up, sometimes acrimoniously, and who disagree about access to the children are not legally represented owing to the cuts, leaving a judge in the invidious position of trying to sort out the case with limited documentation. Who knows what the impact will be on the children while the court tries to muddle through the process? This could be the most important decision in a child’s life, yet we are likely to have two aggrieved people thrown into a combative situation, with terminology and procedures misunderstood, and making matters worse for the child. Or there are instances where a vulnerable person has a valid case for claiming backdated housing benefit, but is unable to find a lawyer to help, because an application to a social security tribunal is taken out of scope, leaving the person with arrears of rent and facing eviction. We have gone from 80% of people being eligible for legal aid to only 20% being eligible. The onslaught on the legal profession owing to the legal aid cuts has resulted in legal aid firms closing, leaving legal advice deserts in more and more parts of the country, and people desperate, with little chance of getting proper representation.

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) on 11 September 2017, the Ministry of Justice said that nationally the number of legal aid providers had fallen from 2,991 in 2012 to 2,393 in 2017. That is a fall of 598, or nearly 20%, in five years. The firms that have survived are also struggling as legal aid rates have not increased in over 20 years. I congratulate the Law Society on its excellent recent report on legal aid, as referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Westminster North (Ms Buck), for Glasgow North East, and for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves).

The legal aid cuts are also impacting on barristers. Junior criminal barristers face a crazy situation whereby they would receive only £44 for doing a plea in Coventry tomorrow, when the train fare is £83 and not recoverable. Would anybody seriously do a job that would leave them out of pocket? The truth is that the legal aid cuts are a false economy and end up costing us all more in the long run. Goldsmiths University has estimated that every £1 cut in legal aid costs us all £6 in additional services provided.

So what is to be done? Hon. Friends have referred to the Bach commission's final report, "The Right to Justice", which was published in September this year. It made 22 recommendations to improve access to justice and redress the failure of LASPO, which has left many people unable to access justice because they cannot afford to. The 22 recommendations, as touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), include: creating a right to justice Act, which would enshrine the right of access to justice in statute and would set up a justice commission to advise, monitor and enforce that right; reforming legal aid assessment, so that anyone in receipt of a means-tested benefit is automatically eligible for legal aid; broadening the scope of legal aid, so that all social welfare law, matters relating to children, various areas of private family law, immigration and inquests, which were so eloquently referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge, are brought back into scope; replacing the Legal Aid Agency with an independent body that is at arm's length from the Government; and reducing the administrative burden on providers.

In addition to implementing the recommendations, we need to repeal LASPO and make sure that legal advice is provided earlier and quicker, along the lines of the old green form scheme. We also need to embrace technology and educate the general public as to their rights, and we need to ensure that the legal aid system is fit for purpose, so that we do not get miscarriages of justice because of the cuts, or see the decimation of the legal profession that does legal aid work. We should never forget that the legal aid scheme was designed to help the most vulnerable in our society, and right now the system is failing them.

3.16 pm

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson.

Today's debate cuts right to the heart of what we mean by justice. Legal aid has been a crucial instrument in ensuring that equal access to justice is attainable. After all, if access to justice is not equal, can we call it justice at all? My surgeries, like those of my hon. Friend

the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), are full of people seeking legal advice. Unlike many hon. Members here today, I do not have a legal background.

The exact meaning of justice may be contested, but it should be quite clear to us all that a society that allows for adequate legal representation for those who can afford it while denying the same opportunities for those who cannot is not a just society. As we have heard, the Law Society has reported on the impact of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. Its findings are stark and paint a picture of a Government prioritising savings for the Exchequer over basic legal rights for our citizens. It makes 25 recommendations to improve the provision of legal advice and representation. It will be interesting to see whether this Government will actually implement the recommendations of one of our foremost legal organisations.

The 2012 Act has significantly reduced the number of areas of law in which legal aid applies, while at the same time tightening the criteria for qualification. Among the findings of the Law Society report is one that

"Large numbers of people, including children and those on low incomes, are now excluded from whole areas of free or subsidised legal advice".

It describes changes to means testing as "counter-intuitive", and even where people qualify for legal aid, they often struggle to access it due to inadequate provision of services, resulting in "legal aid deserts".

Reductions in central Government funds have forced many high street legal aid firms and third sector providers to go under. The increase in legal aid deserts has resulted in many people who qualify for legal aid not being able to access it. Almost a third of the legal aid areas in England and Wales have one or no legal aid housing advice providers. Neither Shropshire nor Suffolk has a housing legal aid advice provider. Children, people with mental health issues and people with low levels of literacy and numeracy are now excluded as a result of changes to legal aid provision.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights condemned the lack of access to justice for children back in 2015 and called on the Government to correct that astonishing situation. Those calls were not heeded. The Act prevents the maximum income cap for legal aid qualification from increasing with inflation, while capital eligibility rules mean there are many benefit claimants who do not qualify for legal aid. The Justice Committee has argued that a lack of sufficient advertising of the mandatory telephone gateway has resulted in its underuse, although it is intended to be the initial point of contact for legal advice on debt, special educational needs and discrimination law.

At every turn the Government have sought to cut public services, but equal access to justice must be one of the fundamental tenets of a healthy democracy. That the Government so wilfully undermine that principle tells us all we need to know about their priorities: not ensuring fairness, not ensuring the preservation of basic rights and not ensuring a good society—social security for the rich, economic insecurity for the rest. Without legal representation being available to all, we no longer have a system of justice, but a system of privilege.

3.20 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. We have had

a good and lively debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on securing it. This is an important subject because a well functioning system of legal aid is a crucial means of ensuring access to justice, and is therefore essential for the operation of the rule of law and democracy itself. This subject has been raised a number of times even in the couple of years that I have been an MP, reflecting widespread concerns about the radical overhaul of legal aid since LASPO came into force in 2013. With the review of LASPO going ahead in England and Wales, and the Scottish Government conducting their own review of legislation that is now 30 years old, now is an appropriate time for this debate.

The hon. Gentleman made a couple of points in relation to Scotland, and if time permits I will say a little bit about that. For now, suffice it to say that the review there will be building from a strong position. That is remarkably different from the system created by the UK Government, where a 38% real-terms cut in funding has left hundreds of thousands to navigate the law and the legal system alone, not because of their means, but because the scope of the legal aid scheme has been drastically reduced. If you went down to the courts in London, Mr Robertson, you would struggle to find a single litigant lawyer or judge who would say that the system in England and Wales is better than the one in Scotland; it would be the reverse.

While the UK Government's review of LASPO is welcome, if we are honest we already know it has been a complete disaster—one which, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) has pointed out, could have been averted had the Government engaged in discussion and looked at evidence before introducing LASPO, rather than five years after it wreaked havoc on the justice system. Whether it is the Justice Committee of this House, the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, the legal profession or third sector organisations, few if any have a good word to say about the reforms.

The statistics, as the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) said, illustrate a drastic reduction in the number of cases of publicly funded representation right from the implementation of the LASPO Act, but it is individual stories about those who are left without access to justice that bring home the reality of the problem. Credit must be given to organisations such as Amnesty International and Coram Children's Legal Centre for highlighting some of those cases in various reports and briefings. When the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales is saying publicly that

“Our system of justice has become unaffordable to most,”  
there can be no doubt that we are in a bad place.

There cannot be a starker example of austerity at all costs than the LASPO cuts, which were introduced without

“any proper evidence-based research,”

according to chairman of the Bar association. Parliament's Justice Committee found that LASPO had unambiguously failed to achieve three of its four stated goals, including targeting legal aid towards those who need it most, delivering better overall value for money, and discouraging unnecessary and adversarial litigation. In relation to the fourth and final goal the Committee stated that

“while it had made significant savings in the cost of the scheme, the Ministry had harmed access to justice for some litigants”.

On the subject of claimant savings, which the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) and others spoke about, I hope the review will consider the extent to which those so-called savings, like too many other austerity cuts, are in fact costs passed on to other public services. As the Justice Committee also said, efforts to target legal aid

“have suffered from the weakness that they have often been aimed at the point after a crisis has already developed, such as in housing repossession cases, rather than being preventive.”

Money saved by the Ministry of Justice means more money spent by homelessness services and social work departments. Meanwhile courts are required to spend more time and resources dealing with party litigants.

The arguments for LASPO the Government used in previous debates have struggled to stand up to scrutiny. They sought to justify the cuts on the basis that it encourages mediation, but as we heard earlier, that is not happening, and I think the Government now acknowledge that. In the year prior to LASPO, there were 31,000 mediation assessments and 14,000 mediation starts, but by 2016-17 the numbers had fallen to 13,000 mediation assessments and 7,700 mediation starts—reductions of 61% and 44% respectively. As the Government were told beforehand, people who are given early legal advice will be more inclined than those who are not to the view that mediation is the best course of action.

Another key argument used in the past is that the legal aid system in England and Wales is one of the most generous in the world. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) hinted at that. As I said in my intervention on him, that is comparing apples and oranges, particularly in relation to continental systems, which are inquisitorial rather than adversarial, so more resources are spent on other parts of the system than legal aid. England and Wales may have one of the most expensive legal aid bills in Europe, but it is a long way down the European league table overall when we look at the total bill for providing justice.

The Scottish Government have announced their own review of legal aid. In previous debates on this subject, I quoted from an article by Professor Alan Paterson, so I am pleased to see he has been included in the Government's review board. He is a legal academic at Strathclyde University and chair of the International Legal Action Group. In 2012, as LASPO was making its way through this place, he wrote an article highlighting that in fact, per capita spend on legal aid in England and Wales had been higher than in Scotland. He asked whether that meant that provision in Scotland was less extensive or generous. The answer was that, on the contrary, the Scottish scheme was still more generous, even in those circumstances.

First, the Scottish system was more generous in scope. That is even more true after LASPO. For example, in Scotland you can still get legal advice and representation on housing, debt, immigration, family, employment law and so on. Secondly, it remained more generous in coverage, with a significantly higher proportion of the population financially eligible for legal aid. The Scottish system had managed to achieve lower per capita spend while remaining more generous. Even if all of Lord Bach's recommendations were fulfilled, Scotland's system would remain more generous than that in England and Wales. There were some reasons why that was the case, which went well beyond policy choices, including,

[Stuart C. McDonald]

for example, the high prevalence of expensive fraud cases in England and Wales. However, for Professor Paterson the crucial difference was that there had been greater success in Scotland in reforming court procedures, both civil and criminal, to reduce legal aid spend. Instead of reducing legal aid spend by not funding people properly to access the court system, the court system was made cheaper to fund access to.

In the months ahead, the group on which Professor Paterson sits, chaired by the CEO of Carnegie Trust and involving lawyers, police, Citizen Advice and others, will look for

“specific measures to reform Scotland’s system of legal aid, maintaining access to public funding for legal advice and representation in both civil and criminal cases, alongside measures to expand access to alternative methods of resolving disputes.”

It is due to report back in February and I hope its findings can feed into the LASPO review. It will most definitely not follow the example of the UK Government in introducing LASPO, despite the suggestions made by the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock. The one thing I am absolutely confident about is that those reforms have a greater chance of success, because they start from a strong place and they will be informed by evidence and engagement rather than the product of a simple austerity drive. That is the key flaw in LASPO, and it is why this Government should rip it up and start again.

3.28 pm

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) on securing this important debate. He made an excellent speech. The Government’s approach to access to justice is a marker of the way they view the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. Though I am relatively new to this brief, some would say I am lucky—or unlucky—to have so many former lawyers on my own side. Regardless of expertise, what unites us in the Labour party is that we all believe that no matter how much someone earns, what their background is or where they come from, our justice system should be there for them when they are at their most vulnerable.

The truth is that the changes to legal aid mean that there is now one rule for the rich and another for the poor. Those with money can pay for justice; those without are forced to represent themselves, or give up on justice altogether. That was at the crux of the argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), who said it is just not a just society if it operates like that. If someone has been a victim of discrimination at work, has had their benefits wrongly sanctioned and faces losing their home, or is fighting a bitter custody battle, the very last thing they have the energy for is fighting a lengthy battle to get legal representation or, worse, representing themselves in court.

Earlier this year, the Labour party’s review of legal aid, chaired by Lord Willy Bach, found a system that was fundamentally broken. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) detailed many of the Bach commission’s recommendations. In particular, the Opposition are concerned about the impact changes have had on victims, particularly the most vulnerable such as children and victims of domestic

abuse; the knock-on impact on access to justice more broadly, even for areas of law still within the scope of legal aid; and the human and financial cost of LASPO.

Legal professionals have warned of a sharp rise in the number of people forced to represent themselves in court to access the justice they deserve. The Public and Commercial Services Union has warned that aggression towards court staff is rising because people are left to navigate the complex legal and court system on their own and without support. Recently, *BuzzFeed* reported that a grandmother in Gloucester had to represent herself in court to prevent her grandchild from being put up for adoption, because legal aid is no longer available for family law. She was told it would cost her between £10,000 and £12,000—her entire income for a year—in court fees if she paid for legal representation herself. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said, there are desperate cases like that coming through surgeries because, as he put it, “There is nowhere else to go.” Will the Minister confirm what the rise in litigants in person has been since the introduction of the LASPO Act?

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the rise in people having to represent themselves is its impact on victims of abuse. It is well known that abusers will use the court system to continue their abuse. Imagine having the courage to leave an abusive relationship—to uproot the kids and start life over—only to find five years later that that abuser is taking you to court to claim visiting rights to the children. Now imagine being told that you are not eligible for legal aid and you have a choice: go to court and represent yourself and your children, allowing your abuser to sit opposite you in court while their lawyer talks about your fitness to be a parent and even cross-examines you, or give in, give up and allow him to have contact with your kids. That is the choice women have faced because of the legal aid changes brought in by this Government.

Those changes include stringent evidence tests requiring victims to prove they have been a victim of abuse to qualify for legal aid, and a time limit on the validity of that evidence. Some women have even reported being charged up to £175 by their doctor to provide that evidence. Charities such as Rights of Women and Women’s Aid warned that these tests could rule out as many as 40% of domestic violence victims from being eligible for legal aid, and the High Court agreed, demanding that the Government remove the time limit. It has been 21 months since that ruling, yet we are still waiting for reform.

Last month, I wrote to the Justice Secretary asking for the date when changes would be introduced. I am still waiting. Will the Minister confirm now, on the record, when the Government will introduce these long overdue reforms, which organisations they have consulted in preparing the new regulations and whether they will be scrapping fees for obtaining prescribed evidence such as a doctor’s letter or police disclosure? Victims of domestic violence deserve peace of mind and justice.

It is not just within areas of law removed from the scope of legal aid where justice is being denied. According to the Law Commission, advice deserts have opened up across areas of the country because huge cuts to legal aid law have forced providers and law centres to close their doors. My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) made the point that that is happening

alongside cuts to local government and citizens advice bureaux, so people really struggle to get the advice they need. In response to my question, the Government admitted that the number of legal aid providers has fallen by 20% since the introduction of LASPO.

**Ms Buck:** Is my hon. Friend also aware that, as has been mentioned by some colleagues, many providers are making excessive personal sacrifices to try to keep some of these services on the road? I am aware of a provider in my constituency where staff have gone without wages for a month in the year to try to keep a service functioning. Those services, and those individuals who are bearing that burden as providers, need to be given praise and credit for their commitment.

**Gloria De Piero:** I will happily give praise and credit, in particular to the people my hon. Friend mentions, but what sort of society is it where those people are having to make choices like that? I thank her for that intervention.

The number of applicants for civil legal aid for domestic violence cases such as protection orders—technically still within the scope of legal aid—has fallen by 20% since 2011-12. The number of domestic violence incidents has risen in that time, so we can only assume that that fall is due to a lack of specialist legal advice. Will the Minister commit now to reviewing urgently the availability of specialist legal aid advice for victims of domestic violence to ensure no victim is put at risk by legal aid cuts?

The human cost of the LASPO Act is hard to underestimate, but perhaps the most scandalous part of this is that we now know that instead of saving money it is likely to have cost us huge sums, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East said. Last week, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), the Justice Minister revealed that the budget will have fallen in real terms by 40% since 2010-11, from £9.3 billion to £5.6 billion, which risks tipping our justice system from crisis into full-blown emergency.

This week, however, a study released by the Law Society found that the removal of access to early legal advice means many more cases are ending up in lengthy court hearings rather than being resolved beforehand. Last month—I make no apologies for repeating this point—the new President of the Supreme Court, Lady Justice Hale, said LASPO cuts are likely to prove “a false economy” because removal of access to early legal advice means people cannot resolve legal problems out of court, which places more pressure on courts. According to the PCS union the rise in litigants in person and failure to access early legal advice are leading to lengthy court delays.

In fact, the Government have already acknowledged that removal of early legal advice is a false economy. Last month, their post-legislative memorandum submitted to the Justice Committee admitted that legal aid cuts have led to the number of families and couples seeking mediation rather than court settlements dropping off a cliff. Labour is committed to immediately re-establishing entitlements to early legal advice in family courts once in government. Will the Minister confirm whether the Government plan to do the same, and will he confirm what assessment the Government have made of the associated costs of their cuts to legal aid?

We welcome the announcement of a review of the impact of LASPO, but for many victims this is five years too late, and without a clear timetable or commitment to act on recommendations, how can victims have the assurance they need that things will change? Will the Minister confirm on what date the review will conclude, which organisations the Government will consult as part of the review and when the Government plan to introduce any recommendations?

We might never know how many families have faced destitution or how many victims have given up on justice altogether as a result of those cuts. I hope the Government take seriously the concerns of service providers, legal professionals, court staff and victims themselves, and act to restore access to justice for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

3.37 pm

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Dominic Raab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) for securing this debate and for his powerful, tenacious speech.

One thing we all agree on at least as a matter of principle, is that legal aid is a fundamental pillar of access to justice. Last year, the Ministry of Justice spent £1.6 billion on legal aid in England and Wales, which accounts for more than a fifth of the Ministry's budget. The Government have a responsibility to make sure that those in the greatest hardship, at the times of greatest need, can secure access to justice, that the most vulnerable are catered for, and that the resources are made available to do that. That is a responsibility that we take very seriously.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, legal aid in Scotland is a devolved matter. I appreciate that in this debate he has not talked a lot about that. It is also devolved in Northern Ireland. I can address the provision of legal aid in only England and Wales, for which we are responsible. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) raised this in relation to spending, but I would note that the Council of Europe's most recent survey post-LASPO found that spending on legal aid per person in England and Wales was the highest of all Council of Europe members. The hon. Gentleman quite fairly made the point that we have a different system from the one used in many parts of continental Europe. Of course, the Council of Europe survey also looks at the spending per capita in Scotland, and in England and Wales it is 13% higher. Neither he nor the hon. Member for Glasgow North East touched on that, for all their critique of the system in England and Wales.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** In fairness, I did touch on that by mentioning the fact that Alan Paterson highlighted the higher per capita spending in England and Wales compared with Scotland. He said that the reason for that was Scotland's greater success in reducing the cost of courts, so the total bill was made smaller not by excluding folk from the scope of legal aid but by making courts less expensive to run.

**Dominic Raab:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention and hope he accepts the figure showing that the spending in England and Wales per capita is

[Dominic Raab]

13% higher. I agree with him on a point that the hon. Member for Glasgow North East did not take up: this is not just about how much money is spent, but about how the resources are allocated. Indeed, the question of access to justice is broader than purely the administration or funding of legal aid, so on that point, I accept what he said.

In truth, the legal aid scheme has been the subject of regular change since its inception. Spending has increased substantially, and all Administrations—Labour, the coalition, and Conservative—have sought to exercise control over spending in recent times. I think we all agree that we need to exercise control over legal aid and other precious public services in order to ensure that the finite, precious resources go to those who need them most.

The most recent reforms were part of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which came in the context of huge financial pressure on the country's finances. The reforms were founded on the principle of ensuring that legal aid continues to be available for the highest priority cases—for example, when an individual's life or liberty is at stake, when someone faces the loss of their home, in domestic violence cases, or when children may be taken into care—and in achieving that, delivering better value for money for taxpayers by reducing the cost of the scheme and discouraging unnecessary litigation. Again, although this has not been mentioned today, in some cases—not all—going to court is not the right thing to do, and I will touch on that if I have time later.

I appreciate that the changes in LASPO were contentious. They were subjected to a significant amount of rigorous scrutiny at the time, as the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said. They were debated extensively and amendments were made before the legislation was approved by Parliament. It has been several years since the implementation of those landmark reforms, so it is absolutely right to take stock. That is why we recently laid before the House a detailed, post-legislative memorandum summarising how LASPO was implemented and making a preliminary assessment of its impact. In addition, my predecessors made a commitment to the House to conduct a detailed post-implementation review of the changes to establish to what degree the reforms had achieved their objectives. It is right that we are now fulfilling that pledge.

As hon. Members have acknowledged, that appraisal will cover each issue that has been subject to a previous commitment by Ministers in this House. The Lord Chancellor recently announced the start of the process. That will be led by officials, but I am keen to listen to interested parties, including hon. Members from across the House. Given the importance of the reforms, it is right that we take time to gather the necessary evidence and views of experts on the impact of the changes.

The hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) asked me about the detail of the review. I will write to stakeholders shortly to invite them to participate in a series of expert panels to consider and sift through relevant evidence to inform our review, which will be comprehensive. I want to ensure that we get the review right. Of course, I will not pre-empt or prejudice the outcome of the review—I am sure she expected me to say that—but we will publish our findings by the summer recess. One or two hon. Members asked about that.

We must acknowledge that the financial pressures in which the LASPO reforms were introduced remain with us today. The proportion of departmental spend on legal aid remains broadly the same today as it was prior to 2010. We in the Government have the responsibility to ensure that taxpayers get the best value for money, as well as deal with the challenges and fixing the problems of the legal aid system as and when they arise.

That is why I recently announced our changes to the fee scheme for criminal litigators in the Crown court. Defence solicitors do incredibly valuable work and we want to remunerate them fairly for it, but since 2013-14 there has been a rise of more than £30 million in the annual spend on that work. That is primarily attributable to a costs judge ruling that changed what we were paying for beyond the initial policy intention. We do not accept that that reflects an increase in the work done by defence solicitors and do not think that the rise reflects value for money for taxpayers, so it is right that we acted to address that.

We have targeted the action to the 2% of Crown court cases—the most expensive cases—in which the problem was identified. Effectively, the change involves a shift in policy so that more remuneration is for work that is actually done and not just for the amount of paperwork that is produced in court. It is absolutely right that solicitors are properly paid for work that is reasonably done through the scheme. At the same time, as the quid pro quo for putting the proper reforms in place to ensure that the precious, finite resources go to those with the greatest need, we announced our intention not to pursue the suspended 8.75% fee cut, which would have affected all solicitors. Those two parts of the jigsaw will make sure that we get this right. As I mentioned, this is not just about the money that goes in, but about ensuring that we get the best use out of it.

The hon. Member for Westminster North raised the issue of domestic violence, as did the shadow justice Minister, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero). Domestic violence is absolutely abhorrent; it appals every one of us in this place, I am sure, and it is an absolute priority for this Government. We are completely clear that genuine victims of domestic violence and abuse must have access to the help that they need, including access to legal aid. That is why we retained legal aid for protective injunctions. Legal aid was granted in more than 12,000 protective injunction cases last year. In addition, in cases involving child arrangements and financial matters, funding is available for those who will be disadvantaged by facing their abuser in court.

As the hon. Lady mentioned, we are considering the findings of the further internal review of the evidence requirements. I will make an announcement on that shortly, which I am confident—or at least, I hope—will receive support from all parts of the House. She also asked who would be consulted. That is of the greatest importance and we are working very hard to get this into the right kind of shape, engaging Rights of Women, Resolution, Women's Aid and the Law Society, so that we can be confident that we are doing everything we can to protect and support genuine victims.

Although it is right to ensure that those who are most in need of legal aid are able to access it, we should acknowledge that the courts are not going to be the right solution in non-domestic violence cases in other areas. I am thinking particularly of some family law

disputes, which the hon. Lady mentioned. In many family law cases, the challenge is to see them not go to court. I accept the point about mediation not being as successful as we had hoped, but the answer is to renew and revive the efforts to achieve greater use of alternative dispute resolution in some cases. That is not just because of the financial implications, but because of the trauma of going to court—not for lawyers, but for the many people affected by such cases. I think that needs to be emphasised.

We need to do more to promote alternative dispute resolution, so we have protected legal help in many cases. Last year, we spent £100 million on early legal advice and assistance in civil and family cases. In other areas, we have introduced a telephone helpline to provide legal advice in certain categories of case to allow individuals to access advice quickly and easily. Last year, there were more than 20,000 instances of advice being obtained usefully and helpfully through that system. We have also developed a user-friendly digital tool—as the world becomes more digital, it is right that the justice system strives to catch up—to make it clear to people when legal aid is available to them.

When an alternative route is more appropriate, people should feel empowered to pursue it without having to find a lawyer at great expense, whether that is to themselves or the taxpayer. For instance, in cases involving separating couples, mediation can be less stressful and quicker than going to court, and it is often far cheaper than using a lawyer. Critically, it can help to reduce conflict after separation and the trauma of that, often on both sides, which in some cases litigation will make worse, not better.

The Government are committed to promoting mediation and its benefits, and legal aid remains available for these cases. In the 12 months to June 2017, a full or partial agreement was reached in 62% of publicly funded cases in which both parties engaged in mediation. Of course, as hon. Members have mentioned, citizens can and do represent themselves in court, in some cases irrespective of whether legal aid is available or whether they are privately funded. Litigants in person are not a new feature of our justice system. People involved in litigation are engaged in a variety of disputes and have a wide range of needs and capabilities. We recognise that for some people, representing themselves in court is purely a matter of choice, but for others it can be very challenging and demanding.

**Bambos Charalambous:** Is the Minister aware that there is a piece in this week's *Law Society Gazette* about rewriting civil procedure rules to accommodate litigants in person, who may not fully understand court procedures in civil proceedings?

**Dominic Raab:** I have not seen that article, but we are constantly looking to ensure that the court system is as amenable as it can be to litigants in person. Contrary to what the shadow Minister suggested, a range of support is available for that; we have ensured that persons without legal representation can get help and support. Since 2015, the Government have invested £5 million of funding to support litigants in person through the litigant in person support strategy, which works with a range of partners across the advice, voluntary and pro bono sectors to provide practical support, whether that is online self-help resources, access to free or affordable

legal advice or representation where possible. Personal support units provide trained volunteers who give free and independent assistance to people facing proceedings without legal representation in civil and family courts and tribunals. More personal support units have opened in courts to provide direct support and information to litigants in person, and there are now 20 such centres in 16 cities.

**Andy Slaughter:** I hesitate to say this, but the Minister is being a bit complacent. All the organisations that he names are wholly laudable, but a PSU, for example, does not give legal advice. Pro bono services are excellent but they cannot compensate for the reduction in legal aid. Mediation is important, but there will be some cases in family law that need to go to a contested hearing. We would like to hear from the Minister that the review will look at the actual effects on the ground, and that where there is a deficit, there will be a genuine attempt to address that. Further, we are asking that he looks at the Bach commission report as part of that process.

**Dominic Raab:** The hon. Gentleman has made his intervention in his usual powerful way. I gave the assurance he wanted that the review would be comprehensive and I have looked at the Bach commission report. I would love to know where Opposition Members would make allocations of public funding to pay for the estimated £400 million needed to fund those reforms. On our side, we want to ensure that we can allocate legal aid as best we can, but we have to take the cost into account.

The point I was in the middle of making in relation to litigants in person was one that the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) made in his intervention. We have also delivered training to better equip the judiciary to support litigants in person through the court process.

To respond to the points made by the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves), my Department is taking steps to improve the situation of bereaved families at inquests. The inquest process is distinct; it can be incredibly traumatic for the bereaved. It is important to help them to understand how their loved ones died, which can be particularly hard so soon after the event. My heart goes out to anyone who goes through that—not just the grief but the fact-finding process, with all the legal and bureaucratic procedures of the inquest system, which must be rather daunting and challenging for a layperson. I agree that early legal advice can be helpful in allowing families to understand the process, which is why we have protected it for inquests within the scope of legal aid. Inquests are supposed to be inquisitorial, and most inquest hearings are conducted without the need for publicly funded representation. However, we recognise that legal representation may be necessary in some circumstances, for which funding is available through the exceptional case funding scheme.

Dame Elish Angiolini's important report on deaths in custody highlighted that there are issues relating to public participation. I reviewed that report and I take it very seriously, which is why we committed to update the Lord Chancellor's guidance so it is clear that the starting presumption is that legal aid should be awarded for representation of the families at an inquest following the non-natural death or suicide of a person detained

[Dominic Raab]

in custody. I hope that that goes some way to reassuring hon. Members. We could debate that important work for much longer, but I will wind up shortly.

As well as looking back over the record of LASPO and some of the previous decisions, it is also crucial to look forward and ensure that access to justice, to which legal aid makes a hugely valuable contribution, is maintained and meets the needs of a modern society. We are investing over £1 billion to transform our courts and tribunals to build on our world-renowned justice system so that it is more sensitive to victims, more modern so that it works more efficiently, swifter and more accessible in the ways that I have described. As part of that, we will digitise our services to make them easier for the public to use, whether or not they are supported by a lawyer. It is essential that we continue our work to ensure that legal aid is made available to the most vulnerable, as part of that wider approach to making access to justice and the justice system fit for the 21st century.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North East again on securing this debate. I welcome the thoughtful contributions on all sides and the opportunity to set out the Government's position and our plans to take the justice system forward, not back.

3.55 pm

**Mr Sweeney:** Thank you for your excellent chairing of the debate, Mr Robertson. It has been a great privilege to move the motion today and to call on the excellent support of my Labour colleagues, who offered their expertise, insight and personal experience of having served in the legal profession and dealt with these issues at first hand.

Most notably, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on legal aid, dealt with the issue tenaciously, making a series of observations about how it is often the most vulnerable people who are missing out on this opportunity and how early intervention is the key to success. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) made the point that the whole premise of the so-called reform of legal aid is wrong-headed because it drives cost into the system. We have heard that every £1 that is cut in the legal system is costing £6 in real terms down the line.

I was also interested in the points made by the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), which is nearly my neighbouring constituency. He observed that although the legal system in Scotland is not suffering from the same pernicious pressures on legal aid, it is damning it with faint praise to say that there are not challenges. I hope the review in Scotland, which is welcome, recognises that the Law Society of Scotland has identified problems and that they ought to be addressed honestly and with an open mind. I hope that will happen and that the resourcing needed to support legal aid is upheld.

I observe the lack of Conservative Members in the debate. I do not know whether that is because they are not prepared to come and defend the system or whether they do not care. I will leave that to other hon. Members to judge. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) made some interesting points, but he also conceded that the cost base premise of reforming legal aid was flawed and that it may well drive cost into the legal system overall, which is unhelpful even by its own standards.

The Minister's response was also interesting. He asked where the money would come from. Actually, if the system is costing money, surely we should look at it honestly through the review process to see where efficiencies can be made. If the review is to be worth the paper it is written on, I hope the Minister will commit to ensuring that people who have experience of using legal aid are integrated into it and that their views will be part of the process. On the wider efficiency of the court system, we recognise the difference in spending in Scotland per capita. Perhaps there is an opportunity to learn lessons from the efficiency of how the overall courts process works there.

A number of considered observations have been made in the debate and I have learned a lot from taking part in it. I hope we all strive towards an aspiration to remove harm, stress and indignity from society. The legal aid process is a fundamental pillar of achieving that. As a society, I hope we move towards a system in which there is a presumption to give legal aid. There should be a presumption of entitlement to accessing legal aid rather than a presumption that people are not entitled to it; someone should not have to prove their eligibility to the court system.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the provision of legal aid.

## Sanitary Products

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the provision of sanitary products.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I am delighted to have secured this debate on an important topic that—let's face it—remains taboo and is still a bit embarrassing for many people. It is precisely because no one wants to talk about it that I believe it is so critical that we do, so I will start by putting my money where my mouth is and telling the House one of my most embarrassing moments.

I was in the first week of a new school. I was 12. I was feeling very out of place and very lost. I saw a teacher beckoning me from the top of a stairwell. I walked towards her and said, "Yes, Miss? What did I do wrong?" I was convinced something was wrong. She said, "Don't worry—everything's fine, but I wanted to let you know that you have a stain of blood on your skirt." Of course, it was not fine. I looked behind and on my light blue uniform there was indeed such a stain. My face went red, and then white. I remember going to the bathroom and crying, and when I stopped crying I called my mum. She came and we went home; I told the school that I wanted to go home to change. In fact, she had brought me another skirt, but I was just so mortified by how many people might have seen it and not said anything.

For me, that was a one-off and I was better prepared the next time, but for thousands of girls in this country, missing school because they cannot afford sanitary products is a regular occurrence. It is an outrage that in a country as wealthy as Britain we let that happen. Thanks to the double whammy of the stigma attached to both poverty and periods, we simply do not know the scale of the problem.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. Does she share my intense frustration about the fact that when I asked the Secretary of State for Education about period poverty just a few weeks ago, her response was ambivalent at best? She appeared to be in denial about period poverty even existing.

**Layla Moran**: Yes, I share the hon. Lady's frustration. I hope we will hear something different on this important issue from the Minister.

Food banks are now actively asking for donations of sanitary products. Teachers are dipping into their own pockets to keep supplies of sanitary products in their desks.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): As a former teacher, I have heard lots of stories from teachers about keeping a supply of sanitary products in the classroom so that girls do not miss out on education because of poverty. Does the hon. Lady agree that that should not be the responsibility of teachers? The Government should do something. The Secretary of State for Education is also Minister for Women and Equalities.

**Layla Moran**: Speaking as another teacher, I completely agree. On the meagre salaries that teachers are now paid, they should not be asked to fork out themselves for sanitary products.

Many of us first realised that period poverty was such an issue for young women when it came to light that teachers in Leeds had got in touch with a charity called Freedom4Girls that provides sanitary products to women in Kenya and had asked whether it would be willing to give them a supply for girls in their school. They had noticed that girls were missing class at around the same time every month, like clockwork. Given the substitutes, including rolled-up toilet paper or old socks, that girls from low-income families are using, it is no surprise that they choose to stay home. Now, I admit that the rolled-up toilet tissue trick has served me well, but I can go and buy some products or go home. For these girls, it is a regular occurrence. It should not be.

Period poverty affects not just girls, but women. Charities and campaigners tell me that it is rife among asylum seekers, refugees, women in refuges, and indeed any vulnerable women who cannot afford to buy the products they need. As a nation we must do better, and as a society we need to get better at talking about this. Given that 52% of the population menstruate, or have done at some point, is it not ridiculous that it has taken until 2017 for an advert for sanitary products to show red liquid rather than blue? I assure hon. Members that it is never blue. The more we talk about periods and normalise what is a completely natural and healthy function, the easier we will make it for young girls to talk about this.

**Paula Sherriff**: When I was at school and we were given a very brief talk about periods, boys were sent out of the class. It is important that menstrual health is covered in detail in statutory sex and relationships education, but does the hon. Lady agree that boys need education about periods, too? Many of them will go on to be husbands, fathers, teachers or doctors. Just as women should understand the signs of testicular cancer, men should understand about periods and period poverty.

**Layla Moran**: I completely agree. School is exactly the right time for that education. I have delivered those lectures myself, and although they may be embarrassing for the boys, it is very important that they understand how this works, and that it is completely natural. That is the point.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. Period poverty also has an impact on homeless people. Not only do they need to be supplied with sanitary products, which the Lunar Project in York supplies, but they need access to public toilets. Surely that needs to be a Government priority. It is a public health issue.

**Layla Moran**: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I visited St Mungo's last week, and that was raised as an important issue that it needs help with.

Very little research has been done on period poverty in schools in the UK, but what we do know is shocking. In a Plan International UK survey of 1,000 girls, 49% said that they had missed an entire day of school because of their period. Critically, of those, 59% had lied about

[Layla Moran]

why, claiming that something else had caused their absence. Meanwhile, 82% of the girls surveyed admitted that they had hidden or concealed their sanitary products, while nearly three quarters said that they felt embarrassed even buying them. Again, I will admit to that: during the 2015 election campaign, I was approached for a chat about politics in Boots, where I had just bought some tampons. I remember standing with them behind my back because I was a bit embarrassed. I would not have done that with toothpaste. That shows how desperately we need to talk more about the issue.

Plan International's campaign to normalise periods—including with a period emoji—is brilliant, as is all the great work that businesses and charities are doing up and down the country. Boots and others have introduced drop-in donation points. Bodyform has promised to donate 200,000 packs of sanitary products by 2020. There are grassroots campaigns such as the Periodical Diary, which has a website on which girls can talk frankly about their periods; it also goes into schools and delivers workshops. However, we should not leave it to charities and business to pick up the Government's slack. How can it be okay for a mother to be forced to choose between food and sanitary products? That is exactly the choice that far too many women in this country face.

I was disappointed that the Chancellor did not make funding available in last week's Budget to ensure that schools could stock sanitary products for those who need them. Let us focus on that small issue. Such a small, simple step would restore dignity, save embarrassment and reduce the number of girls who are missing valuable days of teaching and learning.

It is not too late. The Minister could offer something to these desperate women. I hope that she and others are feeling the political pressure mount. Last year, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) tabled amendments to the Finance Bill that were rejected by the Government—shamefully, I might add. I thank and commend her for her excellent work on the issue. In March, the Education Secretary—who is also Minister for Women and Equalities, as we have already been reminded—said in answer to the then Liberal Democrat MP for Leeds North West, Greg Mulholland, that she would look at the issue of period poverty “carefully”. I look forward to an update from the Minister on where that assessment is, and when the Government plan to publish their work.

I also ask the Minister: did this issue even get a mention in the discussions with the Treasury over the last weeks and months? I sincerely hope that we will not be spun the line that the reallocation of money from VAT on sanitary products to women's charities is enough, because it is not.

**Paula Sherriff:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again. Does she share my concern that £250,000 of the tampon tax fund went to a pro-life charity called Life, which confirmed to me on the radio that if a woman it was helping with housing then decided to have a termination, or indeed had a miscarriage, it would withdraw its services? It is absolutely obscene that money that women pay is going to a charity or organisation that does not provide choice.

**Layla Moran:** That is indeed shocking. This money should be available to all women, no matter their choices, especially if those choices are legal in this country.

We estimate that the small measure of providing sanitary products in schools would cost in the region of £5 million, which is a drop in the ocean compared to the £1 billion found for the Democratic Unionist party. I mention that simply to point out that when an issue is important enough, somehow money seems to be found.

Finally, I also plead that responsibility for this issue not be passed on to schools. Yes, schools have budgets, but those budgets are ever squeezed, and schools still need to find a further £1.7 billion, according to the National Audit Office. I ask the Minister not to pass the buck today on this issue, and to find the small amount of new money that is needed to fund these very important initiatives. Period poverty is a hidden plight, and it is time that it was taken seriously by all. I thank all Members in advance for their contributions, and of course I thank the Minister, who I have much respect for, for listening intently to the arguments put forward in the short time that we have.

4.11 pm

**The Minister for Women (Anne Milton):** It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Mr Sharma; I do not think that we have done so before.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) on securing this debate. She is absolutely right that this topic remains taboo. I think we can go back 1,000, 2,000 or 3,000 years to find some of the origins of the taboo. Even today, some of the cultural issues around women and menstruation are still very strong and not what we would want to see, certainly in this country.

I thank the hon. Lady for her honesty in the story that she told. I was once a young girl at school, and the situation she described would have filled me with horror; I would also have been in the lavatories weeping. I will deal with the issue of poverty and sanitary products in a minute, but while it is a shame that we have not made as much progress as all that, I think back to when I was first elected in 2005, when hon. Members would have been a bit aghast at us even mentioning the word “period” or “menstruation”, so maybe we have made some progress. It is good to see two men in the Chamber—my hon. Friends the Members for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), and for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall)—because this is not just a women's issue. It is also about men.

Period poverty has been the subject of quite a lot of media and parliamentary attention in recent months; I know that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) put a question on it to the Minister for Women and Equalities. In general terms, we are clear that no person should be held back by their gender or background, and if someone cannot attend school on the days that they are having a period, it is much harder for them to reach their potential. They are missing out on valuable school time.

On school absences, the evidence is quite clear. We have all seen that every day of school missed can alter a pupil's chances of achieving good GCSE results and have a lasting effect on their life chances. It is important to say that in this context. That is why we have made it a priority to reduce school absence. There has been some

success, with overall yearly absence rates decreasing from 6.5% of possible sessions missed in 2006-07 to 4.6% in 2015-16, which is quite a marked drop. In the context of this debate, it is interesting and perhaps surprising to note that in 2015-16, the absence rates for boys and girls were almost identical, with boys missing, on average, 4.6% of possible sessions and girls missing 4.5%.

**Paula Sherriff:** The Minister agrees that this is a taboo subject—she is absolutely right—but it seems as if the Government have prevented us from talking about it during the passage of the Finance Bill by refusing to table the normal motions. Can she assure us that the Government will allow us to address this issue directly in the House, because we have been prevented from doing so thus far?

**Anne Milton:** With the greatest respect, I do not know this, because I have not looked into it, but I would imagine that that was not to do with the subject. I have no doubt that the Government were not unhappy to discuss periods; we are having this debate today, so there is no question of that. I have no doubt that there are other reasons for what she describes. I am sure that if the hon. Lady made representations to the Backbench Business Committee, it would accept a proposal for a debate on this subject. It is also open to her party to put this forward as the subject of an Opposition day debate—there is an Opposition day debate today.

There is no question of anybody—certainly not me, as Minister for Women—suppressing any debate about periods; the more we talk about these issues, the more we lessen the taboo. If we cannot talk about them here, how can we expect children to talk about them in school?

We need to look into those absence rates further. Also, not being able to afford sanitary protection does not necessarily mean being absent from school; the two do not necessarily correlate. In fact, if the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon is suggesting that that is the reason why many girls are missing school, it is of note that the girls' absence rate is still lower than that for boys. As I say, we need to do a lot of research on this, and I know that the Minister for Women and Equalities is very keen for that to take place. It will be difficult to dig down into the detail, but we will find out more information by doing so.

The hon. Lady talked about alternatives to sanitary towels and tampons. I looked into this. I was at a meeting with young people who raised some of the issues that she has raised. Actually, I think that one of the Labour Members present was there. We discussed school lavatories being locked during lessons. It seemed odd to me that they should be locked at that time, but it to do with the fact that often it is in the lavatories that a lot of sexual abuse, bullying and harassment takes place. Although there is no policy on that—schools are open to do what they want, and they will open the toilets during breaks, when there can be a teacher on duty—it is a sorry state of affairs that we have got to in this country when bullying, harassment and abuse are so rife that we cannot do what we should be able to do, which is leave the lavatories open so that young girls can be excused from class to change their sanitary protection, or for whatever reason.

There is an underlying problem there, which I know the Minister for School Standards is looking at: making sure that we reduce the amount of sexual abuse and bullying that takes place in lavatories. It has always taken place there; it did when I was at school. The boys' lavatories in particular were a place where boys' heads were shoved down the lavatory at regular and frequent intervals, and the girls' loos were a place where a lot of bullying took place. That has got worse, not better, which is worrying, if we consider all the guidance that has been produced for schools and the fact that we should be a more progressive and open-minded society. I am probably a great deal older than many other Members in the Chamber today, and it feels as though the situation has got worse; it feels regressive, including with respect to taboo.

Interestingly, I saw online a story about Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, that showed just how ignorant people are. She was asked if 100 tampons was the right number for a one-week mission. It is quite extraordinary that people in NASA had no idea—no more than a lot of other people—about this issue.

**Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con):** Although this is a very serious subject, I will raise a smile and share an event with Members. It is to do with the taboo and the lack of awareness, particularly among males. As a father, I was encouraging my oldest daughter to go to her swimming club one night. We had a great exchange of views, but how embarrassed was I when I found out the reason why she was not going? I felt so small, and I was an adult. Both the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and the Minister are absolutely right about the taboo, and that the subject is one that a parent of a 10 or 11-year-old girl has to understand; indeed, I am the father of two girls and we have had a number of these experiences. Promoting awareness and talking about this is helpful, although that does not excuse the poverty aspect and the need to provide young girls with the products that we are discussing. That is a male contribution, to balance the conversation.

**Anne Milton:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I particularly commend him on being here, because it shows that we are all prepared to talk about the issue.

Sex and relationships education and religious education definitely came up as issues. We need to do a great deal more to educate young people about the alternatives. Mooncups are one option; I should think that a lot of people do not know about them. There are alternatives.

**Paula Sherriff:** I am having a CupAware party here in Parliament in January. I agree that they are a fantastic sustainable solution, although they are not for everyone. Will the Minister join me at that CupAware party? Will she also join us at the period poverty march in Westminster on 20 December? Parliament is sitting that day, and I am speaking at that event. I hope the Minister will come along and listen to people who have been affected.

**Anne Milton:** I know it is against the rules of the Chamber, but please indulge me, Mr Sharma; I am going to place a Mooncup on the desk. They were invented after I stopped having periods, but I should be able to talk—

**Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair):** Order. It may be best if the Minister puts the item away.

**Anne Milton:** Sorry, Mr Sharma. I will put it back in my handbag. I do not go on marches as a point of principle, but I will be interested in the feedback of the hon. Member for Dewsbury from that event. I do not feel under political pressure, because although we may argue about welfare benefits and poverty—we obviously do—and the route out of those things, we do not disagree on periods and sex education. It should be noted that the Department for Education does not issue specific guidance to schools on the provision of sanitary protection, but it is without doubt the case, and always has been the case, that the school office will have supplies for children who are caught short.

**Layla Moran:** Will the Minister give way?

**Anne Milton:** If I give way now, I will not have time to make all my points. I ask the hon. Lady to bear with me for a minute.

Members are aware of the long-running campaign for sanitary products to be exempt from VAT and the Government's commitment to zero-rate such products once our leaving the EU offers us the discretion to do so. There are good and bad sides to Brexit, and that is perhaps one of the good sides. In anticipation of that development, we set up the £15-million tampon tax fund, which is equivalent to the amount of VAT paid on sanitary products each year. The hon. Member for Dewsbury raised an issue about one of the organisations, but I was not involved in that. The majority of funding has been grants to frontline charities that aim to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls. Those charities include health, wellbeing and education initiatives and support services for vulnerable women. I understand that some of the money has gone to women's refuges. As a former health professional, I can say how superb some of those organisations' work is. While the tampon tax fund is not currently open for applications, we can look forward to updates on that in the near future.

More generally, I have to talk a bit about poverty. I have talked about periods, and poverty is the other side of the issue. We know that children do worse in households where no one is in work. Children in such households are five times more likely to be in poverty than those in households where all adults work. They are also almost twice as likely to fail at all stages of their education than children in working families. The number of households where no one is working is just short of being 1 million lower than it was in 2010, which means that there are 608,000 fewer children in such households than seven years ago.

**Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab):** Will the Minister give way?

**Anne Milton:** I have seven minutes left, so I will not at the moment. I will give way if I have a bit of time at the end.

We have increased the national living wage, which means that a full-time worker is now £1,400 a year better off. We have increased the personal allowance again, meaning that a basic rate taxpayer is now £1,000

better off than they would have been in 2010. We have doubled the childcare entitlement for working parents of three and four-year-olds in England from 15 to 30 hours, introduced tax-free childcare and supported the right to request flexible working, which enables parents to arrange care in a way that works for them. We have a returner programme going on. It is easy to dismiss all that in the arguments that we want to have across the House on benefits, but it is important to recognise that those measures will make a difference to those families.

**Layla Moran:** On the point of money, this is a women-only issue, pretty much by definition; does the Minister not agree that we need new money to tackle the problem? It is all very well us all agreeing with each other, but without the new money, we are not going to get where we need to go.

**Anne Milton:** What we need is credible and robust evidence about the issue. There are a number of other issues, such as young men in school who possibly have to be clean shaven. There is an issue about razors for boys, which are very expensive. They are probably the item in the supermarket that is more frequently shoplifted than anything else. As a former public health Minister, I know that toothpaste is an issue. People with low incomes are perhaps not spending money on toothpaste when they should. There is a clear correlation between that and dental caries, given the fluoride in toothpaste. There are a number of issues. What things are families doing without because they feel that their finances are too tight for them to afford them? Sanitary products are separate, inasmuch as they are a sensitive issue that can increase the stigma that young women face about their menstrual cycle and their reproductive system. I accept that there are additional issues there, but sanitary products are not the only issue.

It is important to find out about school absences and how many children are not buying sanitary protection because they feel too poor to do so. Only then can we think about possible solutions. I thank Members for attending. I am sure that this will not be the last time that we discuss periods. SRE and RE are critical. What matters to me is that we have lessons that include boys and girls, because it is important for boys to understand. It is important to debunk some of the myths that some makers of sanitary products exploit. Saying that sanitary products are meant to keep someone odour-free is complete nonsense. There is no specific odour associated with menstrual blood; it is not like anything else.

There is a great deal more that we should do. Young boys need to hear about menstruation in the same way that young girls do, but I also feel strongly that young girls need an opportunity to have structured discussions on their own, without boys present, for the simple reason that someone going through puberty might feel very uncomfortable discussing things in front of people of a different gender.

I thank you again, Mr Sharma, for your excellent chairmanship, and for bearing with me when I produced an item in the Chamber. I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon for securing this debate and everyone for their contributions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Dark Sky Status (Cornwall)

4.29 pm

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Cornwall's dark skies status.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma.

As many hon. Members know, Cornwall is a beautiful place. Just saying "Cornwall" brings up pictures of a fantastic rugged coastline, the beauty of the moors, and of course our mining history, which made Cornwall a world heritage site—but also beautiful are Cornwall's skies at night. I was just six years old when President Kennedy said, in an inspiring speech:

"We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills".

When I was about seven, my cousin Dawn used to take me out into the garden and point out the different stars to me. She pointed out the great bear, the little bear and the plough, and I found it fascinating. I was just a teenager when mankind landed on the moon, and I remember Neil Armstrong taking his first steps when I was at school. I remember the roads being blocked in Cornwall as it hosted viewers of a solar eclipse in 1999—my young son became very excited about it. People looked skywards, with the correct eye protection of course, to see our skies go dark in the morning.

Those memories were brought back to me when I met with Ken and Muriel Bennett from the fantastic Caradon observatory on Bodmin moor. Their enthusiasm about the sky at night is fantastic and infectious. I would like to read a quick endorsement from space pilot Rick Hauck, who just happens to be the uncle of one of my local councillors in South East Cornwall. He said:

"Congratulations to those who have successfully obtained certification of International Dark Sky status for Bodmin Moor. Having observed the night sky from the space shuttle, well above sky pollution suffered by a large percentage of inhabited earth, I can assure the stargazers in the Moor and particularly those fortunate enough to have access to the Caradon Observatory that they will have a unique view of the night sky, breathtaking in its grandeur."

Caradon observatory is an amateur-run facility near Upton Cross in my constituency. The observatory has been used as a venue for a number of presentations and open days for students and local groups. The facility inspires the next generation to reach for the stars. That is why I was thrilled when Bodmin moor was formally recognised by the International Dark-Sky Association as the first dark sky park in an area of outstanding natural beauty. In total, it covers an area of 80 square miles, with a buffer zone of about two miles. The bid was made by the Caradon observatory, with the assistance of Cornwall Council. I would like to put on record my thanks to the council for all the work that it carried out to achieve that status.

The exceptional quality of the night sky, commitments to avoid light pollution and the provision of educational outreach were the reasons the award was given. Local residents and businesses are also playing their part. Guidance is being offered in the designated area to help them to choose any lighting, so that the skies can be

even better in future. They are also being asked to consider whether they need lighting, and to think twice before putting lighting up.

It is not just people in the area who will enjoy the dark skies. For millions of years, plant and animal life has relied on the daily rhythm of light and dark—it is literally written into our DNA—but humans have recently disrupted that, and it can cause problems with reproduction, nourishment, sleep and protection from predators. From sea birds that are navigating to amphibians that produce their mating calls only when it is dark, many parts of the ecosystem are being affected by light. One study estimated that millions of baby sea turtles die in Florida alone as they make their way towards the city lights at night instead of the bright horizon over the ocean. It is therefore hoped that the abundant wildlife on Bodmin moor will also benefit from the darker skies.

Ken and Muriel Bennett recently wrote to me saying:

"We at the Observatory have always believed that the younger the children that can be educated to look upwards the more impact it can have, even in some cases pointing them towards the sciences and suchlike. Children generally are infatuated with subjects such as dinosaurs and space travel (Star Wars for instance) and this interest starts at extremely early ages. To be able to promote astronomy as a community, or indeed as a county, would act as a further inspiration to them and hopefully steer them towards academia. We are going to need more and more scientists, engineers etc to fill increasingly technical and development positions and perhaps the earliest and best way forward is to inspire the young."

They continued:

"Together with Cornwall council we have provided the tools to use at no costs to businesses to initially rack up the tourism in Cornwall all the year around. This will create wealth for spin off businesses, and as we become more and more known as a centre for astronomy and science, we would hope to encourage technical and engineering companies to look at starting up or relocating in our wonderful part of the country. We could produce a young labour force second to none."

I want to see much more made of the dark sky status. I want to help Ken and Muriel with their inspirational project.

I thank the Campaign to Protect Rural England for the interest it has shown in dark skies. In its mapping, it found that around only a fifth of England is free of light pollution. It recommends that the Government ensure that local authorities are implementing Government policy to control light pollution, as set out in the national planning policy framework and associated guidance. In the absence of resources for the Departments for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Communities and Local Government to pursue rigorous monitoring, it calls on Ministers to issue a clear statement on how local authorities should proactively take action to control light pollution and protect dark skies in their areas.

I back Ken and Muriel in their call. In particular, I ask the Government what additional information they can make available for businesses and people to help with their lighting. I also ask what grants are available if dark sky lighting is more expensive than other alternatives—especially for people who live in designated dark sky areas, such as Bodmin moor in my constituency.

I would also be grateful if the Minister outlined what help the Government could offer Ken and Muriel to help them with their project. The equipment they need to look up into space is not cheap. I would like to think

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

that we could help with that, and with the facilities at the site, so that children can make the very best of their visit, inspiring them to go further and take up science.

Just last week in the Budget, the Chancellor made much of his welcome boost and long-term support for science and innovation. He mentioned skills and jobs for the new economy. It is hoped that Cornwall will deliver the UK's first space port in 2020. Its website boasts that Cornwall Airport Newquay and Goonhilly Earth Station are well placed to play a critical role in developing the UK's space industry with the creation of a space port. Together, they provide a complete end-to-end UK launch capability to support all aspects of launch, including sub-orbital vehicles and systems and the ability to put satellites into Earth orbit. We need observatories such as the one at Caradon to inspire youngsters into our space industry. This is clearly a new economy, and we need to expand the facilities to ensure we have the workforce we need to make the UK a world leader in this field.

What Government help is available to encourage people to visit dark sky status areas? Cornwall is reliant on tourism, and our skies are our greatest asset. What assistance is there to promote our wonderful night sky to people as another reason to come to Cornwall and enjoy our wonderful hospitality?

Like many other people in London, when I am here I look up but see very little. I encourage everyone to visit my beautiful constituency and to look up at night. I promise that the view is very different. Let us make a real push to inspire people into the new economy. Let us take Bodmin moor's dark skies—a real asset—and make people look up and think, "Where next?"

4.42 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing this debate and on giving us the opportunity to talk about Cornwall. I extend the invitation much further than east Cornwall, right down to west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, which are darker still in lots of ways.

Cornwall is already one of the darkest areas in England. It is well documented that becoming a dark skies reserve has positive effects, including energy reduction and a boost to tourism. It also improves wellbeing—first, for mankind, as it is proven that people sleep better under dark skies, and secondly, for migrating birds, nocturnal animals and mammals. My constituency, like much of Cornwall, has a track record of caring for the environment and wildlife. An example we are proud of is the seabird recovery project on Scilly, where we have supported and increased the population of the Manx shearwater, of which I am a species champion, and other seabirds by getting rid of rats and litter. That is one example of our commitment to create the best possible environment for wildlife and nature.

What interests me most about the dark skies status proposal is the west Cornwall and Isles of Scilly initiative, which will create a protected area from Bishop's rock, 45 km of the south-western tip of Cornwall, right through to the Hayle river, covering the Isles of Scilly and most of what we know as west Penwith. The Lizard peninsular is also in my constituency but is not included

in the current proposal for dark skies reserve status, for understandable reasons—there are a couple of rather large towns between Lizard and west Penwith. However, I intend to do what I can to explore that ambition for the good people of the Lizard peninsular.

I am grateful for this debate, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We already live in an unspoiled dark skies area down in the far south-west; we just do not have official recognition.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing this debate. I want to give an example of something that has happened elsewhere that is similar to what she is trying to achieve. When I saw that this issue was in Westminster Hall for debate, right away I thought of the Wild Atlantic Way, which is something we have done in Northern Ireland with Tourism Ireland. We have promoted the tourism qualities while preserving the rocks, the coastline, the birds and everything else. We have sold it across the world and in the USA. A large number of visitors come not just to the Wild Atlantic Way but to the whole of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is a marvellous thing. If she gets the status, she will get the visitors.

**Derek Thomas**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. If he is offering an opportunity to take some of those American tourists from Ireland to west Cornwall, I would be absolutely delighted.

We live in an unspoiled dark area, so achieving the status would not necessarily require significant changes to light pollution levels today. The many people who are working hard to achieve the dark skies reserve, including my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall and others in west Cornwall, are seeking to preserve and protect the current situation for future generations, but there are plans to build 19,000 new homes in Cornwall and carry out a number of road and other infrastructure projects. That is why it is so important that we secure dark skies status—it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In February, I supported the efforts to achieve dark skies status with a constituency-wide survey. Over 95% of those who responded supported the ambition of the dark skies initiative and the work that the working group is doing, as does the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Exeter University, which delivers education in parts of Cornwall, the National Trust, Penwith Landscape Partnership, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, the Council of the Isles of Scilly, the Duchy of Cornwall, Cornwall Council and the diocese of Truro. A couple of names have been mentioned. I would like to mention Kevin Hughes, a constituent of mine, who been a long-time avid campaigner to deliver dark skies designation in west Cornwall and Scilly. Together, we are united to keep Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly special.

When we secure dark skies reserve status, we will further improve our offer to tourists and our care for the environment and wildlife habitats, and we will lead the way in striking the balance and finding the harmony needed not by resisting house building but by ensuring that the built environment complements the largely unspoiled beauty of the county of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. That is what exercises the minds and energies of large numbers of Cornish residents.

When preparing for this debate, I was sent some fantastic images of the skies above Cornwall at night. It is regrettable that I cannot share them in the Chamber, but hon. Members can view them, along with the 9,805 people who have already done so, on the Dark Skies for West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Facebook page.

4.48 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, and to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing it. It is a debate in which we can enjoy each other's company for an hour. We are probably all going to say broadly similar things.

The hon. Lady talked about going out stargazing in her childhood, and the wonder and awe that that produced in her. It is something I thoroughly enjoy doing with my two girls. When I take them only a few miles outwith the city of Glasgow—I will say a bit more about Glasgow in a minute or two—vistas suddenly appear in front of us that are not visible in the city. It is great for them to start picking out the different constellations and to see familiar things. For example, Orion is visible in the city, but there is far more detail when we go out of the city.

The hon. Lady talked about the 1999 eclipse in Cornwall. I travelled to Cornwall especially for it. My son was just a toddler at the time, and we camped in a muddy field somewhere in Cornwall. We could not get near the beaches the next morning—it was too busy—so we stayed in rural Cornwall and, because of cloud cover, saw nothing. We enjoyed our experience very much.

In 2015, there was an eclipse in the UK; I am not talking about the SNP's general election victory, but a partial eclipse that was visible. Shortly before I was elected, I was a physics teacher. We took the students outside and they were able to watch the eclipse. There is something about space and the universe—when we can see things working other than just the normal that we are used to—that really inspires our young people. During my time as a teacher, I often had young people out doing Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, not in Cornwall but usually in the highlands of Scotland, and usually in the rain and the mud, but very occasionally in beautifully spectacular countryside, where the sun would set and the stars appear.

Many of those Glaswegian school children had never been outside the city. It was quite incredible for them suddenly to see the stars appearing. We said to them, "There's Orion. We're used to seeing Orion, but have you ever seen the redness of Betelgeuse that you can now see? Have you ever counted the number of stars on Orion's sword?" Things like that made it far more alive for them.

We must not underestimate the impact that these experiences have on young people, so it is wonderful to hear that Bodmin moor has been designated an international dark sky landscape. I really hope that the wider community in Cornwall and the community of Bodmin moor can take full advantage of the educational experiences that that offers the young people there.

In Scotland, we have three designated dark sky areas—Moffat, Galloway and Coll—but one could argue that most of Scotland is a dark sky area, because just a short distance from the major cities the stars really are spectacular. I believe that the designation is to do with how many

stars can be seen and light levels; I have not fully read up on how somewhere can be designated a dark sky area, I must admit. I know when I am somewhere dark when I can see the Milky Way, which is often invisible to us. The problem in Scotland can be the cloud cover, which might be a problem in Cornwall—I think they suffer a bit from clouds, too. We do not always get the beautifully clear skies that we need to see things.

There are lots of advantages to being designated as having dark sky status, one of which is tourism, which has been mentioned. Cornwall already has a fairly vibrant tourist industry, but there are other things that we can do not just in Cornwall but across the UK to help to generate the tourist economy. One relates to VAT on tourism. I am glad that the Minister is in her place and I hope that she is listening. Reducing VAT would be a shot in the arm to many small businesses across tourist areas: bed and breakfasts, restaurants, guesthouses, visitor centres, shops and more. What a difference it would make if that could be considered.

The hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) talked about biodiversity, the improvement in wildlife that he has seen in his area and the different schemes that have been used. Protection for the environment is important. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the wild Atlantic way, which I had not heard about but I have just googled, so I know the details, and I will be sure to read up on it for my next visit to Ireland.

Light pollution is something that we need to think about seriously, both in rural areas where it affects the natural environment and in cities. I said that I would talk a little more about cities. Recently, Glasgow underwent a programme of changing from orange sodium lights, which pretty much sent out light in all directions, to far more directed LED lights, which shine down but not up. That irradiance is quite important—not so much in the city, although I have certainly noticed a difference in the number of stars that are visible now. The difference can be seen out of the city or town areas, because there is not the same light pollution a few miles out of town as we are used to in it. As a child, I knew that I was approaching Glasgow when I was 30 or 40 miles away when I saw the infamous sodium glow of the city. The LEDs do not produce quite as much glow, so they are quite important. In the city, we can now see far more constellations. It is great that my two daughters, who are only eight and 10, can now point out far more detail in constellations they see from the back garden and pick out constellations that they could identify previously only when they were in rural areas.

I want to come back to something that the hon. Member for South East Cornwall said: the importance of inspiring and encouraging young people to study these subjects. I am a physicist by profession, although my background is in photonics, not astronomy. The space industry is at a point where interest in it is ready to explode, and we need to make sure that we have the young people there to take advantage of that.

The hon. Lady mentioned the space industry and I know that she is a great advocate for it, but Glasgow is now the satellite centre of Europe. Only San Francisco produces more satellites worldwide. We have three big companies: Clyde Space, Alba Orbital and Spire Global all in the centre of Glasgow. We also have Prestwick airport—not in a dark sky area, but there are some fairly dark areas between there and Glasgow. Prestwick airport is in partnership with Houston—for those who

[Carol Monaghan]

know Scotland, that is not Houston, Renfrewshire, but Houston, Texas—and it is set to become a space port. There are companies ready to take full advantage, but they need these young people to be inspired and to study physics, engineering and astronomy. The young people also need to have some sort of catalyst to make them do that. Dark sky areas can only help.

I thank the hon. Member for South East Cornwall once again for bringing this debate to the House and congratulate Bodmin moor on its dark sky status, which is not as easy to say as it seems. I wish Cornwall all the very best of success in inspiring the young people of that area and hopefully areas further afield. All the best of success in the future, and perhaps the next time I visit Cornwall it will not be so cloudy.

**Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair):** I call Dr Drew.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma—

**Bill Grant** *rose*—

**Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair):** Order. Normal practice is that Members indicate that they wish to speak, which you did not do, Mr Grant, and that is why I called the Opposition spokesperson. However, there is time for you to make a brief contribution.

4.58 pm

**Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con):** I apologise, Mr Sharma; I am relatively new and still learning. I will be brief. Thank you for your understanding.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) for initiating this debate. There was a mention of somewhere being “darker still” Not only do we have whisky stills in Scotland, but we are darker still, too, so we have some things in common. Cornwall had tin mines and Cornish pasties; Scotland had coalmines and Scotch pies. I am going to talk about Dalmellington in the Doon valley, near Galloway forest dark sky park, which the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) mentioned. For 100 years, the Doon valley produced from deep and open-cast mines the coal that kept the nation’s lights on, but it has moved on. Instead of keeping the lights on, it keeps the lights off, because it is a designated dark skies area.

I commend Ken and Muriel Bennett for the good work they have done on Bodmin moor. I extend that compliment to Mark Gibson from the Doon valley, who purchased Craigenkillan estate. He had a vision for the area, which is hurting from the loss of the collieries and industry. In 2012, he opened the Scottish Dark Sky Observatory in Dalmellington. It is wonderful. It cost £700,000, which came from various funding streams. It aims to build on the park’s status and offers visitors a chance to observe the northern lights, the Milky Way, planets, comets and shooting stars—of which I am not one. As I say, the observatory was the brainchild of estate owner Mark Gibson, who is to be commended along with the many others who made it happen. The observatory celebrated its fifth birthday in October with the opening of a new planetarium and the launch of the new dark sky tartan. It is a tourist hub that is breathing life into the Doon valley.

The observatory inspires young people—several colleagues mentioned the importance of that. Amateur astronomers, schools, colleges and universities go along. Viewing is not restricted to night time—that is the ideal time, obviously—because the observatory has links with others elsewhere in the world. I hope that dark skies status brings similar revival and success to Bodmin and the rest of Cornwall. The Scottish Dark Sky Observatory is Scotland’s wee magic corner in the Doon valley. It is wonderful. Come along and see us.

5.1 pm

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** May I say again what a pleasure it is to serve under your excellent chairmanship, Mr Sharma, and how fair of you it was to call the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant)?

I am delighted to take part in this debate. I welcome the way the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) led it, and I congratulate the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on his contribution. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who made an intervention, is no longer in his place, but I know that will not count against him. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), too, for her contribution on behalf of the SNP.

I do not intend to delay Members long, but I will make some remarks that I hope will be helpful. This debate has been a learning experience for me. I usually get people moaning when their lights go off and asking me to ensure that they are put back on, but it is valuable for people to have the opportunity to look at the dark sky. I thought that we might turn off the lights in the Chamber and have the debate in the dark, but that might have challenged a few of us who are not capable of eating enough carrots to read our notes in the dark.

This is a serious debate and, as I say, I have taken it as a learning experience. I did not realise that 65 places in the United Kingdom are classified as dark skies places. That is interesting, because it is difficult to become so classified. I am pleased that, if I were going to be in Cornwall on Saturday, I would be able to go to Jamaica Inn, which I have visited previously. For the princely sum of £15, I could get a meal and look at the skies both before and after it. As a vegetarian, I have to say that I hope it puts on vegetarian options as well as what seemed to be a carvery, otherwise it will not be able to attract me there again. It is important that we celebrate the night sky and teach our children about astronomy and the wonder of the sky, which some of us take far too readily for granted.

This is clearly a consensual debate—we would all like to share in such experiences—but I have some questions for the Minister, just to keep her on her toes. First, do we intend to increase the number of applications to be a dark sky place? As I said, getting accepted is quite a laborious process—the application form is some 100 pages long—so perhaps we can help places that would otherwise fall by the wayside to do that.

Secondly, I am told that Plymouth is in the process of installing LED street lights, which the hon. Member for Glasgow North West mentioned. Not only is that great for the environment, but it will save the city about £1 million—now there is a reason why it should be done. What is the Government’s programme in that respect? I know that is a local authority responsibility,

but if they are serious about this, the Government could take a lead and encourage local authorities that are thinking of installing LED lights—it is all about them pointing down rather than out and up—to do so. That would be a good progressive policy for any Government. How is the Minister helping?

Thirdly, how are we working with different organisations? I declare an interest as a long-standing member of the CPRE. It is good that it has issued awards for dark sky initiatives. It would be interesting to know how the Government links into those awards and works with such organisations.

Fourthly, it is relevant for us to look at the idea of dark sky parks and it is interesting that Cornwall is leading the way in that regard, but I am not sure that I fully understand them, so perhaps the Government will provide some education. Those parks are crucial in encouraging people to come into the countryside not just for day visits—for walks, cycle rides and so on—but to experience a different lifestyle in the evening. It would help to have clarity about what a dark sky park is.

Last but not least, will the Minister say something about how we deal with artificial light? As I say, I always get people coming to me who are worried about the lights being turned off at night. They feel somewhat threatened because of crime and because they have got used to having street lights. It would be interesting, because I had not really understood this, to hear about whether we can declare light a statutory nuisance where it is oppressive and affects people's ability to get to sleep at night. Most councils now turn lights off at night to stop energy being wasted. Can we do that earlier and save more money? Can light be declared a statutory nuisance? From reading the Library briefing, it seems that doing so is quite a complicated process.

I again congratulate the hon. Member for South East Cornwall. This is an interesting topic that catches the imagination of people of all ages, and we may all be able to do a bit more about it in our areas. I represent Stroud, which includes part of the Cotswolds, and I will certainly consider whether we ought to look at dark sky status to encourage people to look at the night sky. I look forward to hearing how the Minister answers all those questions.

5.8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):**

It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on securing this important debate, which has been well attended by people who want to put forward the benefits of the dark sky.

I am sure we all agree that a truly clear, star-filled night sky is one of the greatest spectacles of nature. In an area of low light pollution, it is possible to see as many as 2,000 stars on a clear night, but in our brightly lit modern world many people seldom get the opportunity to experience that. Only last week, a new study was published showing that between 2012 and 2016, the planet's artificially lit outdoor area grew by more than 2% per year.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) talked about her children and her experiences growing up. I have to admit, growing up in Liverpool,

pink skies were a huge feature of the urban glow as the light was partially reflected. Dark nights seemed to be a rarity, and we used to find out about the stars by going to the planetarium. Therefore, when I moved to a village with no street lights at all—I now live in a market town where the council turns off street lights at midnight—it was a joy to behold. Ken and Muriel Bennett, the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall, are right to point out that just looking upwards can spark such an interest in science; indeed, it can inspire a generation. I understand why my hon. Friend wants to support them.

I welcome the initiative undertaken in Cornwall in seeking the designation of Bodmin moor as an international dark sky site. I am delighted that Cornwall is leading by example in this regard, and I recognise the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) in trying to secure further designations in the county. As to this particular reserve, I warmly welcome the work that Cornwall Council, Caradon observatory and the Cornwall Nature Partnership have carried out in partnership with Natural England to develop their environmental growth strategy. This is a positive example of long-term thinking, setting out a vision of a sustainable future for the county right through to 2065.

Following the launch last year, I understand that a wide range of businesses, individuals and organisations have pledged specific contributions towards achieving environmental-based growth in Cornwall. As my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall described, that will reconnect people with the wonder of dark skies, as well as offering a range of benefits to local communities.

The Government have been active for some time in promoting dark skies within national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. For example, we supported the successful application for dark sky status by Exmoor national park, which, in 2011, became the first international dark sky reserve to be designated in Europe. The Government also supported the South Downs national park, which was designated last year. Indeed, Natural England gave its support to Cornwall Council's successful application to designate Bodmin moor as an international dark sky landscape, the benefits of which we have heard so much about.

I draw hon. Members' attention to an example from the other end of the country, where the Northumberland international dark sky park has become the largest in Europe. That has had a hugely positive impact on the local economy, with about 20,000 visitors making the journey to Kielder observatory each year. That in turn has helped the park to become a year-round destination, enabling businesses to remain open and viable throughout the winter months. It has also helped to enhance local residents' quality of life and to inspire and educate people about astronomy and the natural world. That clearly demonstrates the range of benefits—social, environmental and economic—that can flow from such an initiative. I am also aware that, just last month, Exmoor had a week of celebration that boosted its season and is in line with the Government's strategy on productivity in parks and AONBs.

In answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West, VAT is a matter for the Treasury. She will recognise that in terms of tourism, but I know that those representations are made regularly. My hon. Friend the

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) praised the Scottish dark sky observatory. He is right to do so; it is something of which he should be proud.

Light pollution is an issue that can challenge rural areas and blight urban areas. While I fully accept that artificial light brings valuable benefits to society in safety and in facilitating a thriving night time economy—if used incorrectly or carelessly it can contribute to a range of problems. It can be a source of annoyance to people, be harmful to wildlife and waste energy, as well as prevent enjoyment of the night sky.

That is why we have taken action to ensure that light pollution is addressed through the planning system. The national planning policy framework makes it clear that planning policies and decisions should limit the impact of light pollution on local amenity, dark landscapes and nature conservation. It is supported by guidance that emphasises the importance of getting the right light in the right place at the right time and helps local planners and developers to design in ways of avoiding glare and intrusion.

As the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) said, artificial light can be classified as a potential statutory nuisance. That means that local authorities have a duty to investigate complaints about light emitted from premises that could constitute a nuisance or be harmful to health, and they have powers to take action when there is a problem. I have an anecdote: I admit that this did not affect me directly, but at a golf club in one of my constituencies, what the lighting was doing was so poor that I genuinely thought the place was on fire. This is a challenge in which working with businesses matters, and I want to encourage councils to do that. There are grants available to help people get LED lighting, and the Energy Saving Trust is probably the best gateway for that.

I have to alert the House that the jury is still slightly out on the benefits of LED versus sodium, specifically in regard to light pollution. Undoubtedly, LED lights are better in terms of saving energy, but they must be directed downwards in a particular way. Otherwise, there is an issue about the photobiological effects of LED lighting with high blue light components: there is an increase in light pollution, the greater the blue light content of the light source. That has been investigated, and that is why the Government have worked with Highways England and, I think, the CPRE, the Commission for Dark Skies and others to produce guidance on how best to place this in the future.

As we all know, street lighting is an important issue and needs to be managed carefully to strike the right balance between preserving road safety and avoiding light pollution. The Department for Transport is therefore encouraging local authorities to replace their street lighting with modern lighting that reduces the amount of glare emitted. Highways England, which manages our motorways and major roads, is also working actively to minimise light pollution. As I say, it is working with the Commission for Dark Skies and the CPRE to develop improved road lighting standards. It is also investing in technology that allows lighting to be dimmed or switched off in response to lower traffic flows.

Finally, it is important to remember, as has been pointed out, that light pollution can affect wildlife as well as people, and that nocturnal or migratory species in particular can be disturbed by it. We have legislative controls in place to prevent the disturbance of protected species, and Natural England is always available to provide advice in such cases, including by helping to think through the possible unintended consequences of artificial lighting for habitats and wildlife.

It is not only central and local government that are taking action in this area. Last year, for example, the Campaign to Protect Rural England launched interactive maps that allow users anywhere in the country to look at the artificial lighting situation in their postcode compared with other parts of the country. That is a useful tool that can inform local decision making on where action may be needed to control light pollution.

It is important that dark skies and the management of artificial light are part of our future thinking on the environment, given how important we know they are for wellbeing, quality of life and so much else besides. We need to ensure that policy in this area evolves to take account of the challenges and opportunities of the next 25 years, and that we balance the needs of a growing, vibrant society with the ability to access tranquil spaces and clear night skies, now and in future generations.

I will try to answer some of the questions. On funding, I have already tried to guide my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall towards the Energy Saving Trust. I think in particular of the funding she requested for Ken and Muriel Bennett. Off the top of my head, I do not have a particular sense of where that would be at the moment, but I wonder if the Royal Astronomical Society would be a useful avenue to explore. I also think, if they are trying to widen the educational opportunity, lottery funding from the big society may be something to consider.

On some of the other questions that the hon. Member for Stroud raised, the Government are not setting out a plan deliberately to try to grow the number of applications. There are now sufficient parks for us to share how people can best do this, but I must emphasise that the Government do not have a formal role in the designation process. It is non-governmental and non-statutory; in fact, it is undertaken by the International Dark-Sky Association. It looks at five sorts of different designations that people can apply for and be considered for. The applications are reviewed by a standing committee composed of dark sky experts and previous successful programme applicants. Given the growing number of these areas, not only in England but in Wales and Scotland, there is sufficient expertise out there that interested councils could go to. I must admit that I am considering encouraging my council in Suffolk Coastal to consider this.

I conclude by once again thanking my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important issue. She really has highlighted how wonderful this has been for her constituency, and I look forward to hearing more about how the designation of Bodmin moor as an international dark sky landscape helps to benefit her local community, both directly and through tourism and research over the years ahead. I am happy to explore how my Department might want to assist future applications, but I am conscious

that, as I say, there is expertise out there already. As always, I encourage people to look to those who have already had success.

5.19 pm

**Mrs Murray:** I thank hon. Members for attending the debate, which has clearly demonstrated that there is complete cross-party consensus. We have had contributions from the official Opposition, the Scottish nationalists, the Democratic Unionist party and the Conservative party.

I think we are all speaking with one voice on this issue. Let us hope that we can take this forward in every way possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Cornwall's dark skies status.

5.20 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Wednesday 29 November 2017*

## **BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY**

### **Competitiveness Council: Pre-Council Statement**

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** The Competitiveness Council will take place on 30 November and 1 December in Brussels.

#### *Day one—Internal Market and Industry*

The Council will aim to agree a general approach on the single digital gateway. The objective of the Single Digital Gateway proposal is to remove barriers to the single market created by lack of easy access to high quality information and Government services online.

The Commission will then present a competitiveness check-up including details of the objectives of the EU industrial strategy. This will lead into a discussion on the EU industrial strategy, where the Estonian presidency will present a report. The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on the Commission's communication on 'A Renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy'.

The Council will then discuss a number of AOB points on geo-blocking, the European defence industrial development programme, the digital single market, the Unitary Patent and Unified Patent Court, the European SME action programme, the public procurement package and the traceability system of tobacco products. In these AOB points the Council will be given information by the presidency or by a member state delegation.

The day will end with a presentation by the Bulgarian delegation on details of their upcoming presidency.

#### *Day two—Space and Research*

The Council will adopt Council conclusions on the mid-term evaluation of the Copernicus programme. This will be followed by an exchange of views on the way forward for EU space programmes.

The afternoon session will begin with a discussion on Council conclusions "From the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme". The Council will then debate the mission-orientated approach proposed for the ninth framework programme.

Under AOB, the Commission will provide information on the state of play with open science.

Day two will conclude with information from the Bulgarian delegation on their incoming presidency work programme.

[HCWS284]

### **Oil and Gas Authority**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington):** The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) has today laid before Parliament a direction ensuring that the Oil and Gas Authority consults the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on onshore hydraulic fracturing operations.

Under section 4A of the Petroleum Act 1998 (inserted by section 50 of the Infrastructure Act 2015), operators who wish to conduct associated hydraulic fracturing must apply for a hydraulic fracturing consent from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Hydraulic fracturing consent was introduced in the Infrastructure Act 2015 as an additional step to the existing regulatory and permitting regime. However, it does not apply to wells drilled before the 2015 Act came into force and these are not captured by the requirement to seek a hydraulic fracturing consent.

Today's direction closes this loophole and ensures that the same approach for consent is taken for all relevant hydraulic fracturing operations, including where the associated well was drilled prior to the 2015 Act coming into force. For these operations, operators will be expected to meet the same set of standards as required to obtain hydraulic fracturing consent, laid out in the Infrastructure Act 2015. The Government has been clear that shale development must be safe and environmentally sound. The UK has a robust regulatory system which provides a comprehensive regime for exploratory activities and this direction will ensure that all relevant hydraulic fracturing operations are subject to this final step of scrutiny.

[HCWS288]

### **Twenty Third Conference of the Parties**

**The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Claire Perry):** The annual conference of the parties (COP) to the United Nations framework convention on climate change took place in Bonn, Germany, from 6 to 17 November. I led the United Kingdom delegation, accompanied by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey). As demonstration of the UK's action at all levels, the First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for the Environment Roseanna Cunningham also attended.

The UK's priorities for COP 23 were to maintain the global political momentum to combat climate change and to promote the UK's global climate leadership. We demonstrated this commitment to combating climate change through a series of high-profile announcements, most prominently the UK-Canada Powering Past Coal Alliance to phase out unabated coal power, joined at COP 23 by 28 countries and states. We announced over £300 million of programmes to support developing countries to tackle climate change. This included £177 million for sustainable infrastructure in Latin America; £40 million for a climate fund with Germany for reducing emissions in developing countries; £27.5 million to help the world's largest cities tackle climate change; and £62 million towards two initiatives to support Latin America to halt deforestation. We also announced that we will double our funding for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2017 to £230,000—the scientific body whose evidence underpins global climate action.

The context of this COP gave it particular significance, in particular given the recent series of devastating extreme weather events, Fiji as the first small island developing state presidency, and the US's intention to withdraw from the Paris agreement.

In the negotiations we succeeded in keeping the process on track towards agreeing the rules that will underpin the Paris agreement by the end of 2018, and in creating the conditions for a collective raising of ambition by 2020. Outside negotiations we highlighted our impressive domestic and international action including the recent clean growth strategy, and opportunities for the UK's low-carbon sector. Since 1990, we have cut emissions by 42% while our economy has grown by two thirds. This means that we have reduced emissions faster than any other G7 nation, while leading the G7 group of countries in growth in national income over this period.

The Green is Great UK pavilion had nearly 50 events showcasing UK low-carbon expertise and opportunities. Highlights included the international launch of the clean growth strategy, the signing of the "Because the Oceans" declaration, and the showcasing of UK business, academic and NGO expertise.

During COP the UK ratified two important climate change agreements: the Doha amendment to the Kyoto protocol (on developed country action before 2020) and the Kigali amendment to the Montreal protocol (on phasing down hydrofluorocarbons), one of the first countries in the world to do so.

The UK, negotiating as part of the EU, secured its main negotiation objectives: progress in the multiple negotiating tracks on the work needed to implement the Paris agreement; and a clear vision for next year's "Talanoa dialogue"—a collective process which will take stock of current efforts and drive future global ambition.

Other important outcomes from the negotiations included agreement to showcase and accelerate work on pre-2020 action; agreement of a gender action plan and a local communities and indigenous peoples platform to promote greater inclusion in climate action and UN processes; and the launch of an ocean pathway partnership to strengthen the inclusion of oceans in the UN climate process.

Climate change will rightly continue to be at the forefront of international activity over the next year: President Macron will host the One Planet summit in Paris next month; it will feature strongly at the Commonwealth summit in April 2018; it will be prominent in the work of the G7 and G20, hosted by Canada and Argentina respectively; and California will host a major summit for cities and regions in September 2018. Meanwhile the "Talanoa dialogue" process will run through the year culminating in COP 24 in Katowice, Poland and there is further detailed work to be done to conclude the Paris "rulebook" by the end of COP24.

[HCWS289]

## TREASURY

### Counter-Terrorist Asset Freezing Regime: January-March 2017

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Stephen Barclay):** Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (TAFE 2010), the Treasury is required to report to Parliament, quarterly, on its operation of the UK's asset-freezing regime mandated by UN Security Council resolutions 1373 and 1452.

This report covers the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2017. This report also covers the UK implementation of the UN's ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda

asset-freezing regime (ISIL-AQ) and the operation of the EU asset-freezing regime in the UK under EU regulation (EC) 2580/2001 which implements UNSCR 1373 against external terrorist threats to the EU.

Under the ISIL-AQ asset-freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designations and the Treasury, through its Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda (asset-freezing) regulations 2011.

Under EU regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designations and OFSI has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under part 1 of TAFE 2010.

A new EU asset-freezing regime under EU regulation (2016/1686) was implemented on 22 September 2016. This permits the EU to make autonomous al-Qaeda and ISIL (Daesh) listings. Once a designation is made under this regime it will appear in the table available online.

Annexes A and B to this statement provide a breakdown, by name, of all those designated by the UK and the EU in pursuance of UN Security Council resolution 1373.

The table, available as an attachment online, sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter.

#### ANNEX A: DESIGNATED PERSONS UNDER TAFE 2010 BY NAME<sup>1</sup>

##### Individuals

Hamed ABDOLLAHI\*  
Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI  
Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER\*  
Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB\*  
Manssor ARBABSIAR\*  
Usama HAMDAN  
Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN\*  
Mohammed KHALED  
Musa Abu MARZOUK  
Khalid MISHAAL  
Khalid Sheikh MOHAMMED\*  
Abdul Reza SHAHLAI\*  
Ali Gholam SHAKURI\*  
Qasem SOLEIMANI\*

##### Entities

Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)  
Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)\*  
Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation\*  
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)\*  
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)\*  
Sendero Luminoso (SL)\*

#### ANNEX B: PERSONS DESIGNATED BY THE EU UNDER COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 2580/2001<sup>2</sup>

##### Persons

Hamed ABDOLLAHI\*  
Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER\*  
Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB\*

Manssor ARBABSIAR\*  
 Mohammed BOUYERI  
 Hassan Hassan EL HAJJ  
 Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN\*  
 Farad MELIAD  
 Khalid Sheikh MOHAMMED\*  
 Dalokay SANLI  
 Abdul Reza SHAHLAI\*  
 Ali Gholam SHAKURI\*  
 Qasem SOLEIMANI\*

*Groups and entities*

Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO)  
 Al-Aqsa E. V.  
 Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade  
 Babbar Khalsa  
 Communist Party of the Philippines, including New People's Army (NPA), Philippines  
 Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi—DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Army/Front/Party)  
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)\*  
 Gama'a al-Islamiyya (a.k.a. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya) (Islamic Group—IG)  
 Hamas, including Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem  
 Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation  
 Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)  
 Hofstadgroep  
 Islami Büyük Doğu Akincilar Cephesi (IBDA-C) (Great Islamic Eastern Warriors Front)  
 Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF)  
 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (a.k.a. Kongra-Gel)  
 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)  
 Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)  
 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)\*  
 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)\*  
 Sendero Luminoso (SL) (Shining Path)\*  
 Teyrbazen Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK)

<sup>1</sup>For full listing details please refer to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>.

<sup>2</sup>For full listing details please refer to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>.

\*EU listing rests on UK designation under Tafa 2010.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-11-29/HCWS285/>.

**Counter-Terrorist Asset Freezing Regime:  
 April-June 2017**

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Stephen Barclay):**  
 Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (Tafa-2010), the Treasury is required to report to Parliament, quarterly, on its operation of the UK's asset-freezing regime mandated by UN Security Council resolutions 1373 and 1452.

This report covers the period from 1 April 2017 to 30 June 2017. This report also covers the UK implementation of the UN's ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda asset-freezing regime (ISIL-AQ) and the operation of the EU asset-freezing regime in the UK under EU regulation (EC) 2580/2001 which implements UNSCR 1373 against external terrorist threats to the EU.

Under the ISIL-AQ asset-freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designations and the Treasury, through its Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the ISIL (Daesh) and al-Qaeda (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011.

Under EU regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designations and OFSI has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under part 1 of Tafa 2010.

A new EU asset-freezing regime under EU regulation (2016/1686) was implemented on 22 September 2016. This permits the EU to make autonomous al-Qaeda and ISIL (Daesh) listings. Once a designation is made under this regime it will appear in the table available online.

Annexes A and B to this statement provide a breakdown, by name, of all those designated by the UK and the EU in pursuance of UN Security Council resolution 1373.

The table, available as an attachment online, sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter.

**ANNEX A: DESIGNATED PERSONS UNDER Tafa 2010 BY NAME<sup>1</sup>**

*Individuals*

Hamed ABDOLLAHI\*  
 Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI  
 Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER\*  
 Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB\*  
 Manssor ARBABSIAR\*  
 Usama HAMDAN  
 Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN\*  
 Mohammed KHALED  
 Musa Abu MARZOUK  
 Khalid MISHAAL  
 Khalid Sheikh MOHAMMED\*  
 Abdul Reza SHAHLAI\*  
 Ali Gholam SHAKURI\*  
 Qasem SOLEIMANI\*

*Entities*

Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)  
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)\*  
 Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation\*  
 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)\*  
 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)\*  
 Sendero Luminoso (SL)\*

ANNEX B: PERSONS DESIGNATED BY THE EU UNDER COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 2580/2001<sup>2</sup>

*Persons*

Hamed ABDOLLAHI\*  
 Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER\*  
 Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB\*  
 Manssor ARBABSIAR\*  
 Mohammed BOUYERI  
 Hassan Hassan EL HAJJ  
 Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN\*  
 Farad MELIAD  
 Khalid Sheikh MOHAMMED\*  
 Dalokay SANLI  
 Abdul Reza SHAHLAI\*  
 Ali Gholam SHAKURI\*  
 Qasem SOLEIMANI\*

*Groups and entities*

Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO)  
 Al-Aqsa E.V.  
 Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade  
 Babbar Khalsa  
 Communist Party of the Philippines, including New People's Army (NPA), Philippines  
 Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi—DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Army/Front/Party)  
 Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)\*  
 Gama'a al-Islamiyya (a.k.a. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya) (Islamic Group—IG)  
 Hamas, including Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem  
 Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation  
 Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)  
 Hofstadgroep  
 Islami Büyük Doğu Akincilar Cephesi (IBDA-C) (Great Islamic Eastern Warriors Front)  
 Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF)  
 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (a.k.a. Kongra-Gel)  
 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)  
 Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)  
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<sup>1</sup>For full listing details please refer to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>.

<sup>2</sup>For full listing details please refer to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>.

\*EU listing rests on UK designation under TAFE 2010.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-11-29/HCWS286/>.

[HCWS286]

**DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**

**Cyber Security and Data Protection: Update**

**The Minister for Digital (Matt Hancock):** Uber has today estimated that the data breach which occurred in October 2016 has affected approximately 2.7 million user accounts in the UK that were using its service or working for the company in the UK at that time.

Uber have stated that this information included names, email addresses and mobile phone numbers related to accounts globally. Uber have stated they have not seen any indication that trip location history, credit card numbers, bank account numbers or dates of birth were downloaded. Based on current information, Uber have stated that they have not seen evidence that financial details have been compromised.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) have directed Uber to provide them with technical reports that should help UK authorities, in particular the ICO and National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), to verify these figures and whether any additional types of personal data have been compromised. The Government expect Uber to co-operate fully and promptly with the ICO and the NCSC.

The ICO and NCSC will continue to work tirelessly with Uber to ensure this information is correct. The Government expect Uber to respond fully to the incident with the urgency it demands and to provide the appropriate support to its customers and drivers in the UK. Uber users should continue to be vigilant and follow the advice from the NCSC, which can be found on their website.

The Government take both the protection of personal data and the right to privacy extremely seriously. It is always the company's responsibility to identify when UK citizens have been affected as part of a data breach and to take steps to reduce any harm to consumers, and it is welcome Uber has done this.

The Government are strengthening the UK's data protection regime through a new Data Protection Bill, which will give more powers to the ICO to defend consumer interests and issue higher fines of up to £18 million or 4% of global turnover, in cases of the most serious data breaches.

The ICO, NCSC and other relevant authorities in the UK and overseas will continue to work together to ensure the data protection interests of UK citizens are upheld.

[HCWS287]

**HEALTH**

**Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008: Remedial Order**

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** We are today laying a non-urgent remedial order to allow a single person to apply for a parental order, which transfers legal parenthood after a surrogacy arrangement.

Surrogacy has an important role to play in our society, helping to create much-wanted families where that might not otherwise be possible. It enables relatives and friends to provide an altruistic gift to people who are not able to have a child themselves, and can help people to have their own genetically-related children. The UK Government

recognise the value of this in the 21st century where family structures, attitudes and life styles are much more diverse.

Provisions in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 allowed, where a child was born under a surrogacy arrangement, for the transfer of legal parenthood from the birth mother to the intended parents by means of a parental order.

These provisions were updated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, which introduced new provisions to extend eligibility to same-sex civil partners and all couples in long-term relationships, where the relevant criteria were satisfied. This was further amended in 2013 and 2014 to include same-sex married couples.

The Government will now introduce legislation to reflect an equal approach for a single person and couples in obtaining legal parenthood after a surrogacy arrangement. Following a legal challenge to the 2008 Act in 2016, the family court made a declaration that the provision in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 which enables couples, but not a single person, to obtain a parental order following surrogacy is incompatible with article 14 of the European convention on human rights. Article 14 prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of convention rights on the grounds of a person's status, and it was accepted that this could include a single person in this context.

Following consideration of possible legislative options, the Government consider that there are compelling reasons to amend the 2008 Act by order made under the power in section 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 to take remedial action where there is an incompatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998. The Government also propose to remake the parental order regulations in 2018 to reflect all technical amendments to secondary legislation arising from the remedial order.

The Government welcome the opportunity to lay this remedial order to allow a single person the same rights to gain legal parenthood as couples. The order will allow a six-month period where an existing single parent through surrogacy can retrospectively apply for a parental order.

It will be for the Joint Committee on Human Rights to scrutinise the order, take views from parliamentarians and stakeholders and advise the Government and Parliament on the appropriateness of the order. The Committee will have 60 sitting days to undertake these considerations before the Government must review and respond. The Committee will then have a further 60 sitting days to consider and make recommendations to Parliament, before debates in both Houses.

[HCWS282]

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### International Financial Institution: Contingent Liability

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** In 2015, the UK agreed to be a founder contributor of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB will support economic growth in Asia and drive up living standards. The UK's membership will deepen economic ties with Asia and create opportunities for British businesses.

As set out in the summer Budget 2015, HM Treasury made an initial capital instalment of US\$122,180,000 and committed to subsequent payments of the same amount by the UK Government over the four years from 2017 to 2020. The UK's overall capital contribution will total US\$3,054,500,000 of which these five payments together will make up 20% of "paid-in" capital contribution requiring a cash transfer. The other 80%, \$2,443,600,000, is "callable capital"—the AIIB has the right to call for payment for these shares if there is a crisis affecting the bank's assets or loans. As the paid-in capital is an investment, in return for which we get an asset of a share of the bank, the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast this payment as a financial transaction. Financial transactions do not add to public sector net borrowing.

Payment of the third annual contribution of \$122,180,000 is in line with the authority provided by this House under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Initial Capital Contribution) Order 2015. Parliamentary approval for this will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department for International Development.

Furthermore, the payment of the third instalment of the capital contribution incurs with it a contingent liability. In line with the AIIB articles of agreement, the contingent liability rises in line with the amount of callable capital paid. As such, the UK will increase its current contingent liability of \$977,440,000 incurred following the previous two capital contributions, by a further \$488,720,000 to a cumulative total contingent liability of US\$1,466,160,000. A departmental minute to this effect was laid before Parliament on 29 November 2017 to give at least 14 sitting days' notice of the intent to incur a contingent liability. The notice period will be completed on 20 December 2017.

Although the AIIB has the right to call for payment of this callable capital incurred when the initial capital instalment was paid, no such instance has occurred in any multilateral development bank in the past. If the liability were to be called, provision for any payment would be sought through the normal Supply procedure.

[HCWS283]

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Update

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** I am today publishing "Connecting people: a strategic vision for rail", which describes our vision for the railways, and the actions we are taking to make it a reality. We are bringing the organisations that run the tracks and trains closer together to deliver better services for passengers. We are pressing ahead with Network Rail devolution to a series of route based business. We are investing in upgrades to the network to deliver faster journey times, more capacity and unlock growth. We are also improving the customer experience, including smart ticketing.

I am making copies of the strategic vision available in the Libraries of both Houses.

I am also today announcing a consultation on the future of the Great Western franchise, and issuing the invitation to tender for the next South Eastern franchise.

These documents are now available on the website of the Department for Transport.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-11-29/HCWS281/> .

[HCWS281]

# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 29 November 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b> .....	303	<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—continued</b>	
Modern Slavery .....	309	Yemen .....	303
Polio .....	305		
Topical Questions .....	309	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	312
Value for Money .....	306	Engagements .....	312

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 29 November 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL</b>		<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b> .....	21WS
<b>STRATEGY</b> .....	13WS	International Financial Institution: Contingent	
Competitiveness Council: Pre-Council Statement ..	13WS	Liability .....	21WS
Oil and Gas Authority .....	13WS		
Twenty Third Conference of the Parties .....	14WS	<b>TRANSPORT</b> .....	22WS
		Rail Update .....	22WS
<b>DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	20WS		
Cyber Security and Data Protection: Update .....	20WS	<b>TREASURY</b> .....	15WS
		Counter-Terrorist Asset Freezing Regime:	
<b>HEALTH</b> .....	20WS	April-June 2017 .....	18WS
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008:		Counter-Terrorist Asset Freezing Regime:	
Remedial Order .....	20WS	January-March 2017 .....	15WS

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**not later than  
Wednesday 6 December 2017**

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## CONTENTS

Wednesday 29 November 2017

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 303] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for International Development  
Prime Minister*

**Exiting the EU: Costs [Col. 327]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Elizabeth Truss)*

**Rail Update [Col. 339]**

*Statement—(Chris Grayling)*

**Yemen [Col. 361]**

*Application for emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24*

**Food Insecurity [Col. 363]**

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Mrs Lewell-Buck)—agreed to  
Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Opposition Day [5th Allotted day]**

**State Pension Age: Women [Col. 366]**

*Motion—(Ian Blackford)—on a Division, agreed to*

**EU Nationals [Col. 413]**

*Motion—(Stephen Gethins)—agreed to*

**Universal Credit: Terminally Ill People [Col. 438]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Migration Policy and the Economy [Col. 115WH]**

**Arctic Ambassador: Appointment [Col. 141WH]**

**Legal Aid [Col. 148WH]**

**Sanitary Products [Col. 175WH]**

**Dark Sky Status (Cornwall) [Col. 183WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Statements [Col. 13WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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