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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday 17 April 2018

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Tax Avoidance and Evasion

1. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What progress has been made on reducing tax avoidance and evasion. [904774]

8. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What progress has been made on reducing tax avoidance and evasion. [904781]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): Since 2010, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has secured more than £175 billion that would have gone unpaid and introduced more than 100 new measures to crack down on tax avoidance, tax evasion and other forms of non-compliance, so that the tax gap is now at a record low, and one of the lowest in the world, at 6%.

Alex Chalk: It is extremely encouraging that the UK tax gap is at a record low, but it appears that multinationals are trying to run rings around HMRC, so will my right hon. Friend outline what further steps the Government are taking to build on that excellent success?

Mr Hammond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. It is a great achievement to have got the tax gap down to one of the lowest in the world, but we are not complacent. We are currently calling for evidence on whether online platforms should play a greater role in ensuring tax compliance by their users; we are consulting on an innovative split payment method to tackle online VAT fraud; and we will continue to lead in the G20 and other forums on seeking agreed multilateral solutions to the challenge of where and how to tax global digital companies, which are particularly difficult to tax under the current system.

Nigel Mills: I echo the praise for HMRC's performance in tackling tax avoidance and evasion over recent years. Is the Chancellor becoming more convinced of the importance of having public country-by-country reporting, so that not only HMRC but customers and campaigners can see where multinationals are making their profit? That way, we can make sure that they are paying the right tax in the right countries.

Mr Hammond: As my hon. Friend will know, the UK was one of the first countries to implement the OECD model for country-by-country reporting to tax authorities. Those reports have been required for periods that started on or after 1 January 2016. On public reporting, the Government are committed to a multilateral approach to ensure that reporting provides comprehensive information and is fair between UK-headquartered and non-UK-headquartered multinationals. We are engaging constructively on the EU proposals for public country-by-country reporting, which we see as a step in the right direction.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Chancellor will be aware of President Macron's proposal for taxing the revenue of the big internet platforms, which the Chancellor acknowledges are difficult to tax under the existing rules. Are the Government considering building on the *entente cordiale* of recent days by co-operating with and learning from the French model for how we should tax that revenue?

Mr Hammond: I would not call it a French model; it is a Franco-German initiative. We have been working closely with the French and the Germans on this issue. We discussed it at the G20 in Buenos Aires a couple of weeks ago and we will discuss it again at the informal ECOFIN meeting in Sofia at the end of next week. The Government's position is that we are supportive of the EU proposals, but we want to be clear that any such measure can only be a temporary solution. The long-term solution has to be an agreed multilateral approach to the taxation of the digital economy. That requires us to get the United States on side, because most of these global digital companies are domiciled there. Without the United States' co-operation and support, it will be difficult to make any tax system sustainable.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is critical that HMRC collects tax correctly. To that end, will Ministers tell me when I am likely to receive a reply to my letter of 6 February regarding the Roadchef case? HMRC is still to settle with the Roadchef employees benefit trust in respect of money paid to HMRC as tax in error.

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury tells me that he agreed to meet the hon. Gentleman but has not heard from him to arrange a meeting. Let me reiterate on my right hon. Friend's behalf that he would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss this case.

Mr Speaker: Young Philp was standing a moment ago. The fella has stopped standing. Do you want to get in there, man? Go for it.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker; I could hardly resist such encouragement.

I wished only to say how much I welcomed the Government's recent paper, published by the Financial Secretary—[*Interruption.*] There is a serious point. The paper on corporate tax and the digital economy demonstrated again that this country is showing leadership. I encourage the Treasury to look into working with the European Union on a sales tax, and even to consider a user tax, if we can do that more quickly.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's job application is in the post.

Mr Hammond: Thank you for your very carefully tailored piece of demand stimulation, Mr Speaker. It was much appreciated for the economy of the Chamber.

My hon. Friend is right. As I have already said, working with the EU on this interim proposal for a turnover-based tax is, we believe, the right thing to do. We have, of course, also introduced an interim measure of our own, seeking to tax licence fees that are paid to low-tax jurisdictions where we judge that the underlying basis of the licence fee is economic activity taking place in the UK. We have that measure already in place, and we will continue to work with the EU on its proposed measure.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Despite promising to tighten up on Scottish Limited Partnerships, not a single non-compliant SLP appears to have been fined, which could have raised up to £2.2 billion. When will SLPs be banned, and what action are the Government taking on other shell companies to stop tax fiddling and money laundering?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady asks a specific and detailed question about Scottish Limited Partnerships. The legislation is designed to deter the kind of activity to which she refers. The absence of fines should not be taken as an indication of an absence of activity. As she will know, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs always seeks, first of all, to deter non-compliant behaviour before it moves into hard compliance. If I may, I will write to her with a more detailed answer on the very specific point about Scottish Limited Partnerships.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): To follow up on that question about Scottish Limited Partnerships, I am concerned that the Chancellor is not able to stand up and talk about tangible action that he is taking on this matter. This has been a live issue for a very long period of time. Will he commit to taking action on Scottish Limited Partnerships?

Mr Hammond: What I can commit to the House is this: wherever HMRC detects non-compliant behaviour, it will act, but it is for HMRC to determine how best to act in individual cases, and it is right that Ministers do not have direct involvement in HMRC pursuing individual cases. I will write to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), and I am sure that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) will be interested in that reply.

Kirsty Blackman: There were 2,800 Scottish Limited Partnerships registered last year, only 1,100 of which have registered persons of significant control. That is a very low percentage. Of that 1,100, 172 are registered as belonging to Russian individuals. Given all that is happening just now, it is vital that the Chancellor takes urgent action on this—not just a letter at some point in the future. This needs to happen as soon as possible.

Mr Hammond: I will ensure that the hon. Lady gets the letter as soon as possible. It is right to focus on groups that are using structures for non-compliance or

purposes that we would wish to deter, and HMRC will always do so. I will update her by letter, hopefully later today.

Tax: Small Businesses

2. **Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con):** If he will reduce taxes on small businesses. [904775]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The Government are bearing down tirelessly on the tax burden on businesses of all sizes, reducing corporation tax from 28% for large companies in 2010 to 19% today, and for small businesses from 21% to 19%. We will go still further, reducing the burden to 17% by 2020. For unincorporated businesses, we are, of course, increasing the personal allowance, in the previous Budget, to £11,850. That will increase further to £12,500 in 2020—further relief to many small businesses.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that encouraging answer. Businesses are, of course, unpaid tax collectors for the Exchequer and the Federation of Small Businesses recently estimated that businesses spend, on average, three working weeks a year on tax compliance. Is there anything further that the Minister can do to reduce that kind of expensive burden on businesses?

Mel Stride: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the FSB's report. I have not only read it, but met the FSB to discuss the report in detail. I highlight to the House two of its important recommendations: one is around better guidance on taxation, and I have tasked officials on that mission within HMRC; and the second is Making Tax Digital, which we are rolling out for VAT-registered companies in 2019. The report states that this "presents an opportunity to simplify and speed up tax compliance."

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Is the Minister not concerned that the Office for Budget Responsibility report into welfare trends from January this year estimates that £1.5 billion of support for small businesses will be taken from them through the minimum income floor in universal credit? The Select Committee on Work and Pensions heard that 70% of small businesses currently last for 18 months, but that that will reduce to 20% for those on universal credit. Small businesses will be strangled at birth.

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady neglects to mention the fact that small business confidence in the UK is now in positive territory for the first time in many years. We have gone to great lengths within the tax system, as I have just explained, to reduce the burden on small businesses. We rolled out £9 billion of business rates relief in the 2016 Budget and a further £2.3 billion of relief in the autumn Budget last year. We will continue to be on the side of small businesses.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): A significant number of businesses in west Cornwall and the constituency of St Ives, which I represent, are facing extreme hardship because of business rate increases in 2017 and 2018. This is becoming a burden that is too great for them to bear. What immediate help can the Minister make available to these hard-working business owners?

Mel Stride: As I have just identified, the Government have done a huge amount to reduce the burden of business rates. We recognise the important fact that these taxes need to be paid, irrespective of whether businesses are profitable or otherwise. That is why we have gone to such lengths, providing £9 billion of relief in 2016, including transitional relief for those facing the largest potential increases in business rates, and a further £2.3 billion by way of bringing forward by two years the change in the indexation of business rates from retail prices index to consumer prices index, saving businesses £2.3 billion over the next few years.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Business rates are really hitting businesses in York, particularly in the retail sector. This is having a huge impact on our city. On 8 March 2017, the Chancellor promised this House a complete review of business rates, yet we have only seen sticking plasters from the Government. When will that review begin?

Mel Stride: The business rates review is being undertaken by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Productivity

3. **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to increase productivity. [904776]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): My hon. Friend is asking the right question. The only way to deliver a high-wage, high-skill economy of the future and to sustainably raise living standards is to raise our productivity growth rate. This requires investment by the Government in infrastructure, skills, and research and development. Since 2010, this Government have provided over half a trillion pounds in capital investment, increased investment in skills and reduced taxes for business. But raising the productivity growth rate also requires action at the level of the firm. Lower taxes provide a strong incentive for businesses to invest in raising their productivity. These tax reductions include the £9 billion package to reduce business rates that the Financial Secretary has just mentioned.

Andrea Jenkyns: Productivity is a key element in determining our future standard of living. The current productivity gap in Yorkshire and the Humber provides great opportunities for growth. However, significant and sustained investment is required to achieve this. Will my right hon. Friend commit to the excellent northern powerhouse project and ensure that the region gets the vital investment in infrastructure that it needs to improve productivity?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right again. We will only build an economy that works for everyone and every region if we succeed in narrowing the regional productivity gap. For that reason, the Government are fully committed to the northern powerhouse. We have announced a funding boost of £436 million to improve transport connections within the northern city regions through the transforming cities fund, with a further £840 million to be competitively allocated to the largest cities in England. This builds on the record amounts of

more than £13 billion over this Parliament that we are already investing in northern transport, which is more than any previous Government.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): One of the ways in which the Chancellor could improve productivity across south Wales and beyond is to invest in the tidal lagoon project, which will bring skills and investment to the area, in line with what he said in answer to the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns). So may I encourage him please to bring this investment forward and start delivering for the people of south Wales?

Mr Hammond: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the tidal lagoon project is under careful consideration by the Government, and a decision will be made and announced in due course.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): One of the consequences of increasing productivity is of course higher wage growth, which I think would make everyone feel much better. The Chancellor may be aware of the Treasury Committee's recent report on childcare, which called for more childcare support for those undergoing retraining—another way of increasing productivity. What were his thoughts on that, and what is his progress on talks with the national retraining scheme?

Mr Hammond: I am happy to tell my right hon. Friend that we have had a very productive first meeting with the CBI and the Trades Union Congress to flesh out the shape of the national retraining partnership, which is clearly going to be a crucial part of our investment in skills in future. I do take her point on childcare. We have of course seen the Select Committee's report and will respond to it in due course.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): On 6 April, the Treasury bizarrely used a "thumbs up" emoji in a tweet celebrating the worst decade of productivity figures since 1817. I will help the Chancellor with the arithmetic—that is 201 years ago. I know that he has a new-found Tiggerish optimism, but is not his Department's tweet, even with his misplaced exuberance, more like self-delusion for which local government, the police, the NHS, the fire service and public services more generally are paying the price?

Mr Hammond: We have a challenge in this country around productivity, and it is not a new challenge, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. For eight years, the OBR has estimated UK productivity growth, and on eight occasions it has had to revise down the estimates that it had made. This is a long-term challenge facing this country. Rather than trading insults about what has happened in the past, I suggest that the most constructive approach would be for us to work on improving the UK's productivity performance. That means investing in infrastructure—this Government have committed half a trillion pounds of capital investment since 2010—addressing the skills gap, ensuring that capital is available to businesses, and addressing management challenges at the level of the firm. All those strands need to be taken forward together if we are going to create the high-tech, high-wage economy that we all want to see in this country.

Children's Services: Funding

4. Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the adequacy of funding for children's services. [904777]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): In 2016-17, local authorities spent £11.9 billion on children's services and childcare support, and we have seen child development outcomes improve significantly since 2013.

Tracy Brabin: With the number of young people subject to child protection inquiries rising by 140% in the past decade, it is deeply troubling that by 2020 there will be a £2 billion funding gap in children's services. The Minister knows as well as I do that local authorities are crying out for more support, so what urgent funding can she now make available to protect these vulnerable children?

Elizabeth Truss: First, we have actually increased the spending for the most vulnerable by £1 billion since 2010. That is funding for the most vulnerable through local authorities. I would point out to the hon. Lady that the important thing is the outcomes we are achieving. The fact that child development outcomes have improved since 2013 and that more children are getting that good level of development shows that we are investing our money in the right areas.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): There can be no greater service to children than that provided by our teachers. The Chancellor has been very generous in funding a pay rise for NHS staff outside the NHS budgets. What discussions have been had with the Department for Education to see if the same offer can be afforded to teachers?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very important to point out that the agreement with NHS workers and NHS unions has been in exchange for productivity improvements. We are altering the contracts to make them more effective, helping the people in these jobs to achieve more at the same time as giving them a pay rise. The situation in schools is different. Headteachers have much more power over what they pay individual teachers. In fact, last year teachers got an average pay rise of 4.6%, including promotions, so headteachers do have that flexibility to make decisions about what is best for their school.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Can the Minister explain why, when we face a national epidemic of knife crime and serious youth violence affecting more and more children in this country, the Treasury failed to provide one penny of extra resource for the Government's new serious violence strategy, which will now be funded by £40 million of cuts to an already overstretched Home Office?

Elizabeth Truss: I point out to the hon. Lady that real-terms spending in the Home Office is going up. We are funding the Home Office, but the important thing is

what we do with that money, and that is why the Home Secretary has outlined the serious violence strategy to deal with that issue.

Small and Medium-sized Cities: Infrastructure

5. Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps he is taking to invest in the infrastructure of small and medium-sized cities. [904778]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): In this Parliament, investment, including in infrastructure, will be at its highest sustained level since the 1970s, and our cities large and small are an important part of that strategy. We recently launched the £1.7 billion Transforming Cities fund to upgrade infrastructure, in addition to £345 million of funding for local road projects in England.

Jack Brereton: I thank the Minister for his response and for meeting me recently. Does he agree that cities such as Stoke-on-Trent are perfectly placed to benefit from investment through the Transforming Cities fund?

Robert Jenrick: I quite agree: Stoke-on-Trent is exactly the kind of city that we designed the Transforming Cities fund to benefit. From the meeting we had, I know that my hon. Friend sees opportunity in Stoke—in Stoke station, at junction 15 on the M6 and in the proposal for a ceramics park. With the dynamic Conservative leadership in Stoke at the moment, we look forward to receiving that application.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not often get angry in the Chamber, but can I ask the Minister to stop spending his time in Maidenhead and Runnymede and come to the real towns and cities of this country like Huddersfield, where we can see the deterioration of infrastructure everywhere we look? That is because this Government have cut and cut local authority spending—that is the truth. He should get out more and see what this country is really like.

Robert Jenrick: The independent Infrastructure and Projects Authority has said that by the end of this Parliament, central Government funding for infrastructure will be greater in the north than in the south. The hon. Gentleman is speaking to the wrong Minister if he thinks that we do not care about the north. This son of a Liverpudlian and a Mancunian, born in Wolverhampton and representing North Nottinghamshire, needs no lessons from him.

Mr Speaker: I accept that Huddersfield is a most admirable place. My grandma lived there all her life, as I have told the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) before. Splendid place, splendid woman.

Mr Sheerman: And a good football team!

Mr Speaker: Indeed, that too.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Cities are important, but so too are seaside towns such as Weymouth. We desperately need investment in those places, or they will just go to rack and ruin. Having met a Minister from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local

Government recently, I understand that Government are looking at initiatives for towns and seaside towns. Can the Minister confirm that that is true? If so, what money will be available?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The Government's strategy is not limited to cities. The Transforming Cities programme is for our smaller and larger cities, but we are also interested in coastal towns and communities. I recently met a number of parliamentary colleagues representing those communities, and I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to talk about how the Treasury will be working with CLG.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Minister accept that as we leave the EU, many people across the United Kingdom will want to see economic development beyond the south-east of England, and that enterprise zones such as the one in my constituency could be used to maximise inward investment and produce productivity and prosperity for everyone across the UK?

Robert Jenrick: I entirely agree. That is why we are working with Mayors such as the Mayor of Tees Valley, who is producing a development corporation and has new powers of planning reform and so on to drive forward the economy of that part of the north-east. We are very happy to talk to other hon. Members who would like to take forward similar proposals.

Leaving the EU: No Deal

6. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): How much his Department has spent on preparing for the possibility of no deal with the EU when the UK leaves the EU. [904779]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that in the spring statement we allocated £1.5 billion to make sure that we are prepared for all eventualities in the European negotiations.

Mr Bone: I am grateful to the deputy Chancellor for her response. Has she had an opportunity to look at table 4.28 in the Office for Budget Responsibility report accompanying the autumn Budget, which shows a Brexit dividend of £55 billion in the four years between 2019 and 2023? Does the deputy Chancellor agree with her own figures showing that leaving the EU will be a great economic benefit to this country?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. There is indeed money that will be released as a result of our leaving the European Union. We are working on the spending review, which will take place next year, and part of the job of that spending review will be looking at how we allocate that money domestically.

24. [904798] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Many of my constituents work in the financial sector—the financial services sector, specifically. Does the Chancellor not recognise that the closest possible alignment with the single market is the best possible outcome for this vital sector?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor recently made a speech outlining the future of financial services and making sure we get the best possible deal with the European Union. Let us remember that London is a global financial centre—it was recently rated the best in the world—and as well as getting the best deal with the EU, we need to make sure that we can trade with the rest of the world.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It seems to me that over recent months the UK has changed its position from negotiating the final deal before the transition period to negotiating the final deal during the transition period. Is not the reality that the British Government's negotiating position will be considerably weakened once we have left the EU?

Elizabeth Truss: We have made huge progress in the European negotiations. We are seeing business confidence increasing and investment increasing, and by this autumn we should have agreed a clear framework with the EU so that businesses have certainty about future investment.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The UK's economic growth in the final quarter of 2017 was the weakest of any economy in the G7, and the OBR is forecasting that the UK is on course for our worst period of economic growth since the end of the second world war. However, none of these already dire forecasts factors in a no-deal Brexit, which would have a severe impact on jobs, growth and tax revenues. We know the Chancellor knows this; indeed, he has said so publicly. The question is: why are his colleagues not listening to him?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very important that in the negotiations with the European Union we always keep the option of no deal on the table; otherwise, we will not get the best possible deal. But we are very confident of achieving a good deal. Why is the hon. Gentleman not welcoming the fantastic economic news we have had this morning: the lowest unemployment—again—since 1975, and wages up by 2.8%? It seems to me that there are an awful lot of Eeyores on the Opposition Benches.

National Living Wage

7. **Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effect of the introduction of the national living wage on low pay. [904780]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): The national living wage has increased levels of pay. In fact, we have seen the wages of the lowest fifth of our population in terms of earnings increase by 7% in real terms since 2015.

Johnny Mercer: My right hon. Friend will know that the two biggest policies that have put more money into the pockets of the lowest earners in this country have come from this Government—namely, the increase in the tax threshold and the minimum wage. What more will the Government do to make sure that private businesses, together with public services, are working to continue to increase wages and improve the quality of life in cities such as Plymouth?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to increase productivity, which will help drive up wages. That is why we are working with employers on the national training scheme, and why we are increasing our investment in areas such as maths and computer science to make sure that our young people have the skills for the future that will enable them to earn high wages and compete with the rest of the world.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The national living wage applies only to people over the age of 25, yet the cost of living in places such as Stoke-on-Trent is the same for people under the age of 25: there is no discount on their rates, mortgage or utility bills. Do the Chancellor and his Ministers think it is fair that these people are expected to earn less when their living costs are not affected?

Elizabeth Truss: What is unfair is the fact that, under the last Labour Government, youth unemployment went up to 20% and those young people were left on the scrapheap, whereas we have reduced youth unemployment by 40%. We have more young people in work earning the vital skills for their future.

21. [904794] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Despite this increase in the price of labour, why is unemployment continuing to fall, particularly youth unemployment?

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend is right, and the reason is that we have taken the time to reduce the deficit to make it easier for employers to take on staff. We have reduced corporation tax, making it easier for companies to hire people. That is why we have the lowest unemployment since 1975, and rising wages. It is a shame that Members on the Opposition Benches cannot acknowledge that massive achievement.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is completely unacceptable that a 17-year-old and a 25-year-old starting on the same day in the same job face a £3.63 gap due to their ages. When will the Chief Secretary end the scandal of state-sanctioned age discrimination?

Elizabeth Truss: It is extremely worrying that those on the Opposition Benches would rather see young people out of work and without opportunities than in work, learning and getting the skills for their future. All the evidence shows that if we set the rate too high we see youth unemployment, which is exactly what happened under the previous Labour Government.

Corporation Tax

9. **Mr Alister Jack** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the recent reduction in corporation tax on employment and wages. [904782]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): There can be no doubt that this Government's record on reducing corporation tax from 28% in 2010 to 19% now, and further on down to 17% in 2020, has driven growth, kept prices down, pushed wages up and, indeed, led to more employment. Since 2010, we have seen more

than 3 million more people in employment, and, as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has just outlined, the lowest unemployment since 1975.

Mr Jack: Successful businesses create jobs and pay taxes. What steps are the Government taking to back businesses that play by the rules?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend uses the expression "play by the rules". I should make it very clear to the House that those that do not play by the rules will be clamped down on by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. We have brought in £175 billion in respect of clamping down on avoidance, evasion and non-compliance since 2010. We have, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has outlined, the lowest tax gap in our history, at 6%. Those who play by the rules will benefit from our pro-business policies: bringing taxes down, providing relief on business rates, and other measures such as the employment allowance, worth £3,000 for the first employee as a relief on national insurance contributions.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): When it comes to employment and wages, and the impact that corporation tax cuts have had, we have heard a lot of crowing from Ministers this morning, but we all know that our economy is wildly different, depending on where people live. Has the Minister asked for a distributional analysis of the impacts that he has just been talking about?

Mel Stride: We have debated at great length the issue of distributional analysis, in this Chamber and around the Finance Bill and other measures. The hon. Lady will know that all tax measures are subject to TINs and to various assessments. We are also bound by the Equality Act 2010 when we take decisions in respect of taxation. As a Minister, I can assure her that I take my duties in that respect extremely seriously.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Businesses in my constituency welcome the cut in corporation tax, but does not my right hon. Friend share my concern that businesses in Gordon are being damaged by punitive business rates and the highest income tax rates in the United Kingdom?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which is probably best listened to very carefully by some of those on the Opposition Benches. I can only speak for the UK Government here in this House, and we will continue to be on the side of businesses, small and large, to ensure that their tax burden is as low as possible.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Lines ag and bg of the spring 2017 Budget predicted that the cuts in corporation tax would cost the Treasury over £24 billion by 2022. If the Treasury had had that money to invest in infrastructure and construction, how many well paid construction jobs could the money have created?

Mel Stride: Let me make two simple points. First, corporation tax cuts are clearly to the benefit of businesses who employ people, create wealth and generate the taxes we need to fund our vital public services. Secondly, we have cut corporation tax from 28% to 19% since 2010, and the corporate tax take has risen by 50%.

Mr Speaker: A moment ago the Financial Secretary was banging on about TIMS. I was not informed about this matter, but the Clerk has consulted his scholarly cranium and he tells me that it stands for Treasury information management systems.

Mel Stride: Tax impact notes, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Oh, TINs! Well, I am sure everybody attending to our proceedings was perfectly well aware of what the right hon. Gentleman had in mind. I am sure I was in a minority of one in not knowing. And what are those pigs I see flying in front of my very eyes?

Productivity

10. **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): What plans he has to increase productivity. [904783]

15. **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): What plans he has to increase productivity. [904788]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): Productivity, as I have already said, is at the very forefront of the Government's agenda. That is why we established the national productivity investment fund, a £31 billion package of investment in infrastructure and research and development, and committed to introducing a national retraining scheme, which we are developing in partnership with the CBI and the TUC to ensure that British workers have the skills they need to benefit from technology change. The focus now has to be on moving forward with firm-level initiatives, such as Be the Business led by Charlie Mayfield and Made Smarter led by Juergen Maier, that start to look at the challenges we face at the level of the firm in this country to make sure that we are doing what we need to do not only in infrastructure and skills but in investment in management at the level of the firm.

Sir Nicholas Soames: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all the steps he is taking, with the Government, to improve productivity, which is very badly needed indeed in our economy? Does he agree that it is becoming increasingly difficult, with a very modern, interconnected, internet-driven economy, to successfully garner the information needed to truly assess how well we are doing on productivity and across the whole scale of Government statistics on the economy? Does he agree that this is first-order business and that we need to get this matter resolved so we may have a better picture overall?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right that there is some evidence of a measurement challenge around the productivity figures. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) asked a few moments ago about the relationship between rising wage costs and continued economic and employment growth. The question is why the tightening labour market is not driving a higher productivity performance and whether an element of that is in fact a management challenge. A great deal of time and energy is being spent on this issue. Indeed, the figures on productivity for the last two quarters do, on the face of it, show some improvement. Now, one swallow does not make a spring and we should be very cautious about interpreting—even a summer, Mr Speaker. I am even less ambitious! We should be very cautious about interpreting those figures,

but, as we see record high levels of employment in the economy, we should expect them to help to drive the UK economy's productivity performance.

Stephen Hammond: I listened to my right hon. Friend set out the Government's plans for investment in transport and infrastructure a few moments ago. What direct impact on productivity does he expect those investments to have in the regions where they occur?

Mr Hammond: We are undertaking the largest rail investment programme since Victorian times and the largest road investment programme since the 1970s. Overall, the Government are now investing public capital at the highest rate for 40 years. This is one of the components that drives productivity in one of the areas where we have a long-standing gap with our principal competitors: too little public infrastructure. We are closing that gap and that will have a positive impact on productivity growth, but we still have to tackle skills, capability at the level of the firm, and access to capital. It is an important strand, but it is only one strand of the productivity conundrum.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): As the Chancellor just said, skills are a crucial plank of improving the nation's productivity. Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, apprenticeships have collapsed. The Government have also slashed resources for further education institutions, such as the excellent Bishop Auckland College in my constituency, so what is the Chancellor going to do about the middle-level skills base?

Mr Hammond: The Government are highly committed to the apprenticeship programme. I recognise that starts are down—we always expected that—but something else is happening, because analysis shows that now that employers are contributing with their own levy to apprenticeship programmes, they are opting for higher-level apprenticeships. There are fewer starts than we expected, but we are seeing a much higher level of apprenticeship. There are more degree-level apprenticeships and more apprenticeships at the higher levels. The Department for Education and the Treasury are looking carefully at how this is working—[*Interruption.*] This is a serious issue, but the important question is about making sure that the skills that the economy needs are generated.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): The only productivity figures worse than the UK's are the Chancellor's—that is not an insult, but a statement of the blindingly obvious. Is he aware that a recent TUC assessment indicated that, in effect, the UK economy is on a negative trajectory? GDP growth is weak—on an annual basis, it is the weakest it has been for five years—and hours worked have declined. Public investment lags significantly behind that of our comparators. Wages remain stagnant and inflation is stubbornly high. What is his answer to this—perhaps a tweet, and maybe with a smiley emoji this time?

Mr Hammond: Not for the first time, I do not recognise the picture of our economy that is painted by Opposition Front Benchers. Figures today tell us that we have new record high numbers of people in employment, and new record low unemployment figures. That should be

something that we are celebrating. Real wages are forecast to turn positive from this quarter and to go on growing thereafter. Employment is expected to grow by another 500,000 by 2022. We are working hard to ensure that productivity performance increases across the economy because that is the only sustainable way to achieve higher wages and higher living standards.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid that progress has been terribly slow today. I would like to get through some more questions from Back Benchers, but we will need to have single-sentence questions and pithy replies. We do not have time for long pre-prepared speeches.

Building our Future Programme

11. **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): What progress has been made on implementing the Building our Future programme. [904784]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Progress has been excellent on the Building our Future programme. We have now secured locations for 12 of the 13 regional hubs and negotiations are continuing on the final site.

Dr Williams: The HMRC office in Stockton South is closing. Hundreds of staff are being offered jobs in Newcastle, which involves a three-hour minimum round trip that people say they cannot make, because their family lives are built around a job that they are proud of. Will the Minister please meet me given what we now know about the impact that the closure will have on Teesside and its people?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman will know that all staff who may be affected will have face-to-face consultations with HMRC staff a year before any changes occur. Some 90% on average of those across the programme will be in a position of having left employment or retired, or finding it perfectly acceptable to move, in this case to Newcastle. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the issue.

Productivity

12. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on ensuring that people have high-tech skills to increase productivity. [904785]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): The Government are working across Departments to help to prepare businesses and working people to seize the opportunities that technology will bring. At the Budget we announced, among other measures, a trebling of fully qualified computer science teachers, the creation of a T-level in digital skills and the retraining partnership that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has spoken about.

John Howell: What steps are the Government taking to make sure that these skills are widely available?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are trying to roll out our changes in apprenticeships, T-levels and other matters as quickly as possible across the country. We commissioned the

Juergen Maier “Made Smarter” review to increase the adoption of digital technology in businesses—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—and we will follow up on that in the months to come.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The circular economy has the potential to create hundreds of thousands of jobs in this country. What discussions has the Minister had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about how we can maximise these opportunities?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Lady raises an important point. We are working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a call for evidence on single-use plastics in the spring statement. We intend to make proposals in due course.

National Debt

13. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What comparative assessment he has made of the size of the national debt (a) today and (b) 12 months ago. [904786]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): Public sector net debt as a percentage of GDP was 85.1% at the end of February 2018, which was 0.9 percentage points higher than last February. The latest forecast shows that debt will fall this year, two years before the fiscal rules require.

John Mann: The national debt is going up by £5,000 a second. Can I be helpful? Will the Minister join me in stopping hospitals that are outsourcing staffing to avoid VAT, with an estimated 6% savings on wages lost to the Treasury, from doing so?

John Glen: The important point is that the debt is going down this year. We want to avoid a situation like that in the last three years of the last Labour Government, when public sector net debt doubled.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) can very easily shoehorn in his own inquiry on this question. Question 14 is not dissimilar to 13—have a go on 13, man.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Well done.

14. [904787] **Michael Tomlinson:** That is very kind of you, Mr Speaker. Is it not vital that we reduce our national debt, stop wasting taxpayers’ money on debt interest repayment, and spend it on our public services instead?

John Glen: I concur absolutely with my hon. Friend. He might like to know that between 2010 and 2017, we spent £300 billion on debt interest, which is twice the current annual budget of the NHS.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The session would not be complete without the voice of Shipley.

Philip Davies: Given all the talk of austerity, will the Minister tell us what Government spending was in cash terms in 2010 and what it is in this financial year?

John Glen: I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government have taken a balanced approach to the public finances, reducing the deficit by three quarters. We have also made tough decisions to invest as well as to spend on public services, which is what the public expect of us.

Topical Questions

T1. [904799] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): My principal responsibility is to ensure economic stability and the continued prosperity of the British people. I shall do so by building on the plans set out in the autumn Budget and the spring statement. The Government are determined to meet the important challenges we face and to seize the opportunities ahead as we create an economy fit for the future.

Jessica Morden: The Treasury is holding on to £10 million from the Roadchef employees benefit trust following a High Court dispute. Can Ministers ensure that HMRC returns the money to the trust with interest so that the 4,000 workers and former staff, including a number of my constituents, can finally receive what is owed to them?

Mr Hammond: We touched on this matter earlier, I think. It is important that HMRC deals with matters separately from Ministers, but we are aware that HMRC is in discussion with the trustees in this case and we hope for a resolution soon.

T2. [904800] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that consideration should be given to making expenditure such as gym membership tax deductible in recognition of its health benefits and, ultimately, cost-saving benefits for the NHS?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Perhaps I am in need of the gym, Mr Speaker.

I shall take that as an early Budget representation, and my hon. Friend should be aware that we already have various tax-free reliefs in respect of health in the workplace—check-ups, eye tests, the cycle to work scheme, on-site workplace gym membership and welfare counselling. Of course, our soft drinks industry levy has led a number of companies to improve the quality of their products healthwise.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): In advance of today's debate on Syria, I welcome financial measures to sanction the Syrian regime. According to past Government figures, £151 million of assets belonging to leading figures in the Assad regime in Syria have been frozen by authorities here. Since then, 261 Syrian individuals have been listed as financial sanctions targets in the UK. Can the Chancellor tell the House what the Treasury's best and latest estimate is of the total value of assets held in the UK by individuals connected with the Syrian regime?

Mr Philip Hammond: I do not have a figure for the latest valuation of those assets. Many of the assets in question will be property assets, I suspect, meaning that the values will move from time to time. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Treasury is fully engaged in the process across Whitehall of seeking to deal with unacceptable behaviours of the type that we have seen in Syria. Financial sanctions will remain an important tool in our armoury, whether we are dealing with chemical attacks in Syria or attacks on the streets of the UK.

John McDonnell: I welcome the Chancellor's response, but the problem is that the lack of transparency in our financial system makes it virtually impossible for him to know exactly how many assets linked to such regimes are owned in the UK. It is estimated that more than £5 billion of assets owned by Assad and his associates are being held overseas and, according to international reports, the UK is recouping far less of the corrupt assets owned by individuals linked to the Syrian regime than is being recouped by other countries. For example, assets linked to the Assad regime worth more than half a billion pounds have been not just frozen but seized by the Spanish authorities. So far, no unexplained wealth orders have been used against Syrian regime figures.

The Government promised to give a date for the publication of a register of owners of UK property based overseas back in 2015, but now, three years later, we are told that a register will not be published until 2021. Will the Chancellor bring forward the date for the introduction of what is an essential defence against corruption?

Mr Hammond: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is being a little bit harsh on the unexplained wealth orders. The legislation has been in place for only a couple of months, and we will of course look at opportunities to use it. As for his challenge on the date for the registers, I will look into the matter, as he has asked me to do. I will then write to him to let him know the reason for the date that we have set, and whether there is any opportunity for it to be brought forward.

I think that we are all in the same place on this issue. We all want to ensure that London cannot be used as a route for dirty money—for the ill-gotten gains of regimes that are stealing from their people and channelling money offshore. It must be recognised that London is the world's largest global financial centre, which presents us with some challenges, but we will continue the work.

T4. [904802] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): High street retailers such as Toys R Us and Carpetright are closing branches because of the rise in online sales. What measures are Ministers taking to reduce business rates, which currently penalise property-based businesses to the advantage of online retailers?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend puts her finger on the significant structural challenge that we face. This country has a higher penetration of online retailing than any other major economy—we are at the cutting edge—but that, of course, has an impact on traditional retailing, and we have to expect that patterns of retailing will change. We have brought forward by a year the switch to three-year business rates reviews, and we have introduced

a package of £9 billion of business rates relief, but we will have to consider this major structural challenge over the coming years as a nation.

T3. [904801] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The European Commission has hinted that the UK may be given access to the European financial services market, but only on the basis of equivalence. Does the Chancellor support the preferable basis of mutual recognition for that future arrangement, and what prospect does he see of securing it?

Mr Hammond: As the right hon. Gentleman will well understand, I much prefer a system based on mutual recognition. There are problems with the EU's equivalence regime: it is arbitrary, it is unilateral, and it can be withdrawn with zero notice. No one can operate a multitrillion-dollar business on the basis of such arbitrary arrangements. However, we are working with the Commission and key member states, and I am optimistic that we will reach a satisfactory solution.

T5. [904803] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What assessment have the Government made of the prospects for real wages in our country?

Mel Stride: As my hon. Friend will know, this morning we were given the good news that we are now back in positive real-wage territory. He will also know from the projections of the Office for Budget Responsibility at the time of the last Budget that we anticipate an increase in real wages throughout the projection period.

T6. [904805] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The number of people with unmanageable payday loan debt has more than halved since the Financial Conduct Authority introduced a total cost cap more than three years ago following pressure from Members on both sides of the House. New analysis by Citizens Advice suggests that extending the cap to doorstep-loan and rent-to-own markets would have the same impact on problem debt in those sectors, and could save consumers up to £154 million a year. Will the Chancellor consider taking such action?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The hon. Gentleman has made a very sensible point. The FCA is looking into that proposal and will publish another report in May. I met Andrew Bailey just a few weeks ago to underscore the importance of the issue, and as we proceed with the construction of the single financial guidance body that will deal with some of the challenges of problem debt, I know that this will be another focus of its work.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Automation, machine learning and artificial intelligence have the potential to offer huge productivity gains. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with colleagues across Government about providing leadership in this important field so that we can reap the maximum productivity boost and be at the forefront of this exciting technology?

Mr Philip Hammond: As I have said many times in this House, we have two choices: we can either run away from this challenge; or we can run towards it and

embrace it. In fact, if we want to maintain the living standards of our people and the status of our economy in the future, we have no choice but to embrace it—and we are doing so. I announced at the autumn Budget funding to support the uptake of digital technologies across Government, allowing the Government to be an exemplar, but we are also promoting these technologies to private business. The UK is at the forefront of many of these cutting-edge technologies.

T8. [904807] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The housing crisis has gone on for far too long under this Government. Lewisham's Labour council is about to build its 500th new council home since 2015, but many people still come to my surgeries because they reside in temporary accommodation. Will the Chancellor now commit to reversing the 63% cut in funding to the council's budget so that Lewisham can get on with building more homes?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): First, we have committed to building 300,000 homes per year over the next decade, which is vitally important to address the issue. Also, when we came into government, 80% of local government funding was being provided centrally, but we have now enabled local councils to raise that money. That is the right thing to do—people vote locally and councils should be accountable locally.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): We have heard encouraging news today about wages, but what more can Ministers do to help my constituents with the cost of living?

John Glen: There are a number of challenges that need to be overcome for the poorest. We have increased the national living wage by 4.4%—to £7.83 an hour—and also the allowance that applies before people pay tax. We have made other changes, such as freezing fuel duty, to ensure we are doing all that we can for the hardest-working people in our communities.

Mr Speaker: Order. I exhort the Minister to face the House; I understand the temptation to look backwards, but one should always look at the House.

T9. [904808] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Many NHS trusts have set up subsidiary companies to take advantage of a VAT loophole to save money, often at the cost of the lowest-paid staff. Does the Chancellor have any plans to close this tax loophole and place the NHS on the same VAT footing as local government?

Mel Stride: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. Perhaps this is something that I could take up with her offline so that I fully comprehend the exact point she is raising.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Last year, more businesses were created in the UK than in any other developed economy. Does that not show that the Government's policy towards businesses is working, and what will the Treasury do to build on that success?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that a record number of businesses are starting. We saw double the amount of investment in tech companies last

year compared with the previous year. Britain is booming, and that is because we have taken the important measures of reforming our welfare system, making it easier to take on staff and reducing corporation tax. The Labour party wants to stop all that, raise taxes and make it harder for businesses to succeed.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): The Government's green rhetoric is nothing more than empty promises. They say that they have ambition, so when will the Chancellor commit funding for onshore wind, solar and, importantly, the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon? The benefits of these investments would boost not only our green economy, but the supply chain and jobs.

Mr Philip Hammond: I have already answered the question on the Swansea Bay lagoon—we are studying the project. All of these projects have to meet value-for-money tests. We already have a fantastic offshore wind sector, with record low costs to the consumer through offshore wind generation. We have to decarbonise our economy in a way that also keeps electricity prices as low as possible for consumers and businesses.

Mr Speaker: Single-sentence inquiries: I call Vicky Ford.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Last night, the pound hit its highest rate against the dollar since the referendum. Will the Chancellor join me in welcoming this sign of international confidence, which is so contrary to the run on the pound predicted by the shadow Chancellor?

Mr Hammond: I welcome all signs of international confidence, but I never comment on the exchange rate of the pound.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Six in every 1,000 people in the UK have lymphoedema. What commitment will the Government make to deliver a comprehensive and equitable strategy for NHS England and to end the postcode lottery for lymphoedema patients in the United Kingdom?

Elizabeth Truss: That is a question for the Secretary of State for Health, but I would point out that we are putting extra funding into the health service, including an extra £10 billion to help with nurses' pay and to ensure that we are investing in the technologies for the future.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): The shadow Chancellor mentioned frozen Syrian assets. There has been a long-running cross-party campaign to unfreeze frozen Libyan assets so that that money can be spent compensating the victims of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism. Will my right hon. Friend look at that again? Is he aware that it would require a UN resolution? Is that the case with Syria's assets, and does he think that all the members of the UN Security Council would be in favour of such a move?

Mr Philip Hammond: My hon. Friend tempts me down a complex route. I will look at that again; I am familiar with the issue from my time as Foreign Secretary. The decision that Ministers have to make around the freezing of assets is a quasi-judicial one, and it has to be

made very carefully in the light of the specific facts. There are great complexities in Libya, where in some cases competing authorities are claiming ownership of assets.

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

Mr Speaker: You are a patient fellow, Mr Stone, and you have been waiting for a long time. Let's hear you.

Jamie Stone: Thank you, Mr Speaker. One way to boost the UK's productivity is to give disabled people employment opportunities. Can the Chancellor of the Exchequer tell me what discussions he has had with the Department for Work and Pensions and possibly the Scottish Government about maximising the potential of our disabled people?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that getting more disabled people into work is vital for our economy and also for helping with their quality of life. I am very happy to look at what he has suggested.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Last year, the Department of Health announced £7.8 million for building a cancer unit in my constituency, which of course I was delighted about. However, the money is stuck in the Treasury and the Humber NHS Foundation Trust is unable to withdraw it in order to start the building work. Please can the Minister urgently unlock that money so that the trust can start to build that desperately needed cancer unit straight away?

Mr Philip Hammond: I will look at what the hon. Lady has said, but I very much doubt that an amount of money of that size will be stuck in the Treasury, because of the NHS's delegated limits. But let me look at it, and I will write to her.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): In Bury, a small business and its supply chain are still owed £4.1 million by Carillion for their work on the Royal Liverpool Hospital. Will the Chancellor agree to meet me and them to hear their ideas about how we can prevent the likes of the Carillion collapse from happening again and protect our small employers from the changes in the construction industry?

Elizabeth Truss: The important thing about the issues with Carillion was that, first, we made sure that public services operated, and that, secondly, we did not give rewards for failure in a company that went bust. I would be very happy to look at the specific situation that the hon. Gentleman has outlined and to meet him.

Mr Speaker: A sentence without subordinate clauses from Mr David Linden?

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): How many apprentices in the UK are being paid just £3.70 an hour?

Mr Speaker: Very well done. Unfortunately, it was so well done that the Chancellor did not hear it. Blurt it out again, man!

David Linden: How many apprentices in the UK are being paid just £3.70 an hour?

Mr Philip Hammond: I will write to the hon. Gentleman, Mr Speaker. I do not have the number immediately to hand.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): What message will the Chancellor be sending to the thousands of public and civil servants who will be at the march organised by the TUC on 12 May asking for a fully funded, above-inflation pay rise?

Mr Hammond: The Government have been clear that the cap on public sector pay has been abolished and that it is for individual Departments and bodies to talk to their workforces about how pay can be increased in a self-funding way through productivity enhancements. We have seen that being done in the NHS with the “Agenda for Change” deal, which is now with the unions and staff for voting. It is a very good pay deal, but it will be supported by significant improvements in productivity. If we can do it there, we can do it across the piece.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. One colleague has been standing for a long time and has not asked a question. I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker; it is a straightforward question. In this age of online shopping, what help is available for start-up businesses that are focused on internet shopping?

Mr Hammond: Start-up businesses involved in online shopping are able to avail themselves of the full range of support for any start-up business. There is no specific regime for online shopping businesses.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Very well. If the question is a sentence, I call Stephen Lloyd.

Stephen Lloyd: Thank you, Mr Speaker. An elderly couple in my constituency, Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald, are about to lose their home. They have an interest-only mortgage with Santander, which does not allow mortgages for people over 75, although the Nationwide allows them for people up to 85. Will the Minister help me to persuade Santander so that Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald do not lose their home in the coming weeks?

John Glen: Clearly, the lending decisions of individual banks are a matter for them, but I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to consider the case and see what has happened.

Points of Order

12.40 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you can advise me in relation to a response I received to a question today about the business rates consultation. I have had responses not only from Treasury Ministers, but from Ministers at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. After being forensic on the issue, those other Ministers put me back in the hands of the Treasury, but the Treasury is now sending me on the merry-go-round again. Please may I have clarity on how to get a response to my question?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. I cannot provide that clarity, but I think the request for same is entirely reasonable. To be fair, the Chancellor has heard the point of order, so may I suggest a quiet word and that an attempt is made to provide satisfaction? It is extremely important that Members are not unreasonably frustrated in pursuit of factual information. We will leave it there for now.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I brought this to your attention this morning so that I can raise an important matter. It has been brought to my attention by several sources that the Government have been selectively offering intelligence and security briefings by the Prime Minister's National Security Adviser on the current situation in Syria and the UK's military response to it. The briefings appear to have been offered to members of the Labour Opposition not on the basis of Privy Counsellor status, but on the basis of those who are sympathetic to the Government's position. That leads to concerns that the Government are using intelligence briefings to manipulate Parliament and to bolster support on the Opposition Benches for their behaviour based not on security terms, but on politics. Is it right that the Government should treat members of the Opposition in that way? What mechanisms are open to get to the bottom of the matter?

Mr Speaker: The only mechanism that I know is open to the hon. Gentleman is for him to complain about that via the device of a point of order, which he has just eloquently done. In all solemnity, I understand why he is disconcerted or worse about the matter. That said, and while thanking him for his characteristic courtesy in giving me notice of his intention to raise this point of order, I must say to him—he will be disappointed, but this has the advantage of being true—that with whom the Government shares intelligence material is entirely a matter for the Government. It is not a matter for the Chair.

If I can attempt to share the hon. Gentleman's pain, sometimes senior members of the Government share information with me, and I am bound to say that the more astute and sensible, from the very highest level downwards, do that, but other Ministers are not so inclined to do so. A similar principle applies in relation to the Whips. Some Whips share things with you, sometimes you think it is worth telling a Whip something, and sometimes you think, "Actually, that is about the last

person I would tell." It is a mixed experience, and I understand that he is upset about the matter, but it is not a matter for the Chair. In one sense, I am flattered the hon. Gentleman invests me with powers that I do not possess, but I cannot provide a resolution of his problem. If he really persists, I will hear him once more.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I would not dream of trying to invest you with powers that you do not have or do not wish to have. My point is that you preside over a Parliament that the Government have done everything to sideline since last week, and it has now been brought to my attention that they are using intelligence and security briefings here to manipulate Opposition Members—not to inform those Members but to potentially bolster their own case.

I understand your point, Mr Speaker. Of course the Government can share briefings on Privy Council terms with non-Privy Counsellors, but surely the deeply cynical fashion of only doing so if one agrees with the Government cannot go unchallenged.

Mr Speaker: It has not gone unchallenged because the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter. The truth is that sometimes in life a problem does not have a solution, and this might be an example. At any rate, if there is a solution, it is not in my hands to provide it.

What I very politely say to the hon. Gentleman is that the only solution I could offer yesterday to the very widespread sense that the situation in Syria should be debated was to use my powers to grant a Standing Order No. 24 debate, and that is what I did. It was open to me to do that for today, and that is what I did. I do that in order to try to help the House.

I do not want to be flippant about it. I will always try to help the hon. Gentleman, but I also believe in being absolutely candid with him and other colleagues. Is this something I can resolve? It is not, but he has aired it. If he can persuade a Minister to see him about the matter—it is an arguable proposition whether he will be successful in his mission—I know he will pursue the matter like a dog with a bone.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you have any indication of a Minister coming to this House to make a statement about a purported legal challenge to the Scottish Parliament's UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill? There are media reports that the Attorney General has confirmed that such a challenge is to proceed to the UK Supreme Court, notwithstanding the fact that the legislation was ruled as within the Scottish Parliament's competence by Scotland's chief Law Officer, the Lord Advocate, and the fact that it was passed in the Scottish Parliament by 95 votes to 32, with only the Tories and one Lib Dem voting against it. The Bill was due to become law tomorrow.

It is surely a very serious matter that the Tory party, having been defeated by a democratic vote of the Scottish Parliament, is now seeking to challenge it. Is there any way I can secure a ministerial statement, rather than Ministers briefing to the media as per usual?

Mr Speaker: I understand entirely why the hon. and learned Lady is concerned about this matter. When I came into the Chamber I had received no notification of this matter—it may be that something has become public more recently.

Joanna Cherry *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I do not need the matter dilating further, so the hon. and learned Lady cannot do so. I gently say to her that she knows some Members wanted to raise the matter in the Chamber today via another mechanism and, on grounds of pressure of time, I declined for it to be raised by that other mechanism. In those circumstances it is more than a tad, if I may say so, cheeky of Cherry to seek to raise it via a point of order. *[Interruption.]* That was a very good-natured reply. The hon. and learned Lady should consider herself very fortunate that I am being so patient.

It is perfectly possible for the matter to be raised on another day and, knowing the pertinacity of the hon. and learned Lady, I feel sure she will make an attempt on a subsequent day, and it is open to her to do that. I hope that is helpful. *[Interruption.]* “Generous”, says somebody from a sedentary position. Well, that is my middle name.

Prisons (Substance Testing)

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

12.48 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about substance testing in prisons and similar institutions.

Drugs in our prisons are a major problem, which we need to do more to tackle. A recent review by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons in 2015 showed that 52% of prisoners had used drugs in the two months before they went to prison. A survey from 2016-17 showed that 31% of female prisoners and 47% of male prisoners found it easy or very easy to get drugs in prisons. In 2016, there were almost 11,000 incidents of drug finds in prisons in England and Wales alone, with 225 kg of illicit drugs recovered.

Psychoactive drugs are a newer problem for our prisons system and for our society, but they are a growing and dangerous problem, and further action is needed. These drugs are often incorrectly termed “legal highs”. Not only do they alter the mind in broadly similar ways to class A drugs, but they have particularly pernicious and damaging effects on mental health—on issues such as anxiety and depression. A recent Centre for Social Justice report in 2015 suggested that a majority of prisoners had tried Spice, a particularly famous psychoactive drug. Last July, the former prisons and probation ombudsman, Nigel Newcomen, said that 79 deaths were directly linked to psychoactive substances between June 2013 and September 2016.

So what does this Bill actually do? Currently, the Prison Service can test for prohibited drugs specified under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. In order to add a newly formed and manufactured psychoactive drug to this list of prohibited drugs, the Government need to manually add each and every psychoactive drug to it. As Members will fully appreciate, that can be cumbersome and time-consuming. It is relatively easy for drug manufacturers and chemical experts to get around the law. They do that by producing slightly different versions of these psychoactive drugs, which means that our Government and Prison Service are entirely reactive and slow. As a result of our legislative process, the Government can get a psychoactive drug added to the banned list only after it is already doing a huge amount of damage to our system.

The Bill is straightforward and simple. It allows a generalised definition of “psychoactive drugs”, one provided by the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, to be added to the statute book, which will allow the Prison Service to test prisoners for any and all psychoactive substances, now and in the future. This allows our Prison Service to be proactive, not reactive. As we go through the legislative process, I would hope to get cross-party and Government support—I can see the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) in his place—to expand the powers of the Prison Service to test for the misuse of pharmaceutical drugs and to provide for generalised prevalence testing. That would allow prisons to have a better understanding of the drugs that are running through the system.

We spend lots of time in this House debating how to cut the reoffending rates of prisoners. I believe, as I suspect do many Members, that excising the cancer of drugs from our prisons would be one of the most significant things we could do to cut reoffending rates. We know that drugs are a problem, but the Government and the Prison Service are fighting this with one hand tied behind their backs. Let us untie that hand, and untie the hands of prisoners who become addicted to or stay addicted to drugs throughout their time in prison because there are, sadly, too many drugs in our prisons.

If hon. Members are serious about prisons being drug-free, they should support this Bill. If they are serious about rehabilitation of offenders, they should support this Bill. If they are serious about social mobility, by which I mean the ability of men and women to leave prison without the burden of drug addiction, so that they can get on and make the most of their lives, they should support this Bill. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Bim Afolami, Gareth Snell, Nicky Morgan, Ben Bradley, Priti Patel, Gillian Keegan, Mr Simon Clarke, Vicky Ford, Sir Henry Bellingham, Lee Rowley, Alex Burghart and Leo Docherty present the Bill.

Bim Afolami accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 July, and to be printed (Bill 195).

Military Action Overseas: Parliamentary Approval

Emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

12.56 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Parliament's rights in relation to the approval of military action by British Forces overseas.

It is great to see you in the Chair, Mr Speaker. All I have to say is that the nation stands in admiration of your constitution and as you were in the Chair yesterday from bell to bell for eight and a half hours we are all now in admiration of your personal constitution as well. I also thank you for granting this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) was right in yesterday's debate when she said, in quoting the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), that this is a hung Parliament and therefore political power must pass from the Cabinet to the Floor of the House. But I do not totally agree with that analysis; the lack of a majority makes it more urgent, but the principle of accountability to Parliament when it comes to war making was established in 2003, when the Labour party had a large majority, and that principle must now be enshrined in law. Indeed, the tombstone of the former Foreign Secretary, our friend the late Robin Cook, who warned so eloquently in this House against the decision to invade Iraq, records his words:

"I may not have succeeded in halting the war, but I did secure the right of Parliament to decide on war."

I am sorry to say that the Government are now attempting to overturn that democratic advance.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that protecting the lives of UK servicemen and women will sometimes require the use of surprise and that therefore prior parliamentary approval could on occasion be life-threatening?

Jeremy Corbyn: I will be dealing with that point during my speech. I do understand the point the hon. Gentleman is making and the need for urgent action at times, and there are provisions for that in the proposals we are putting forward.

During yesterday's statement, the Father of the House—the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—the leader of the Scottish National party and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, as well as of the official Opposition, agreed that Parliament should have been recalled. That is a common position on all sides of the House, absolutely irrespective of our views on the action undertaken in Syria last Saturday morning.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should listen not just to voices inside the Chamber, but to voices outside—the great British public? A woman on the doorstep in Ealing said to me this weekend, "Did we just regain the sovereignty of Parliament to hand it over to a Prime Minister with no majority or, worse still, to Trump?" Did she not have a point?

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend's constituent is right that parliamentary sovereignty requires that Parliament holds Government to account.

The Father of the House said that

"once President Trump had announced to the world what he was proposing, a widespread debate was taking place everywhere—including among many Members of Parliament in the media. However, there was no debate in Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 16 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 47.]

It was happening everywhere, except here. The SNP leader put it more succinctly:

"When the Prime Minister called a Cabinet meeting last week, she should have recalled Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 16 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 48.]

The UK Prime Minister and the Executive must be accountable to Parliament, not to any other Government, let alone to the whims of any President or other head of state. The need for an independent British foreign policy, based on human rights and international law, has never been more urgent.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that we have a Prime Minister who inherited a parliamentary majority that she managed to lose rather clumsily, and rather than responding to her situation by trying to build consensus throughout the House on a whole raft of issues—this is the most important, but I include all Opposition days and so on—she has decided to respond by ignoring Parliament?

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend is right that all kinds of debates could have taken place and a consensus reached, or not. Either way, there could have been that opportunity. That is what Parliament exists for. Parliamentary approval can be crucial to ensure the democratic legitimacy of any planned military operation or warlike act, just as it can establish public consent for a Government's wider strategy.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman mentions a vote; had there been a vote in this place last week to protect innocent civilians in Syria, how would he have voted?

Jeremy Corbyn: This is a debate about process. [*Interruption.*] Could the hon. Gentleman contain his aggression for a moment? I made very clear my concerns about the strike, its legitimacy and the legality behind it, so I should have thought it was pretty obvious what my view on it was. That is not to say, as I pointed out last night—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) made a very fine speech yesterday. He spoke on his feet with considerable passion and integrity, but he should not now rant from a sedentary position. He used to misbehave 30 years ago, when he stood against me in Conservative student politics. We have both grown up since then.

Jeremy Corbyn: Are we going to get a video of that debate, Mr Speaker?

Currently, the Government of the day, of whichever hue, can, under the powers of the royal prerogative, deploy our armed forces without obtaining parliamentary

consent for that action. It is important that our armed forces know that they have the democratic backing of Parliament and the support of the public for any action that they undertake.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Is not the essential point that the action that the Government have taken goes against the statement they made in 2016, when they prayed in aid action taken in 2013, 2014 and 2015, the nature of which was essentially similar to the action that was taken last week on the Prime Minister's prerogative? Unless it is clarified and codified in law, the uncertainty will remain as to whether the Government really respect the convention to which they say they still adhere.

Jeremy Corbyn: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right. There is an established convention, and I fear that the Government were trying to breach that convention with their actions yesterday. I welcome the parliamentary convention that has developed since the Iraq war, whereby the Government are expected to seek the approval of the House before they commit forces to action.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope it is a point of order.

Mr Duncan Smith: It is. Following the intervention by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), I wish to clarify the difference between this most recent operation and what happened in 2013—

Mr Speaker: Order. No, that is not a point of order.

Mr Duncan Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: First, the right hon. Gentleman should sit down when I am on my feet. Secondly, in deference to his very great seniority, I will hear him if it is a short sentence.

Mr Duncan Smith: In 2013, America and Britain had not gone to the UN and were planning to; with this most recent operation, we had been to the UN and it had been vetoed.

Mr Speaker: It is an extremely interesting debating point but, if I put it very politely, as a point of order I am afraid it would be, in old-fashioned O-level terms, an unclassified.

Jeremy Corbyn: The previous Prime Minister came to the House to seek authority for military action in Libya in 2011 and in Syria in 2015. In 2013, he sought authorisation for military action in Syria that the House denied. I am sorry to say that the Prime Minister's decision not to recall Parliament and to engage in further military action in Syria last week showed a flagrant disregard for this convention. That was underscored by the Secretary of State for International Development, who said yesterday that

"outsourcing that decision to people who do not have the full picture is, I think, quite wrong. And, the convention that was established, I think is very wrong."

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

Jeremy Corbyn: No, not at the moment.

It seems that the convention that was established in 2003 and that is in the Cabinet manual is being tossed aside as simply inconvenient. It is necessary and urgent that the House has the opportunity to discuss its rights and responsibilities in respect of decisions on UK military intervention.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not giving way for the moment.

Those rights and responsibilities are not currently codified by law and, as we have discovered in recent days, cannot be guaranteed by convention alone. The Prime Minister's actions are a clear demonstration of why Parliament must assert its authority on this subject.

But this is not solely about the actions taken last weekend, although they illustrate the case, or what action the Government might seek to take in the coming weeks and months; this is a principle that I know has long-standing support across the House. No matter on which side of the House Members sit, we all recognise that we are here to represent the interests of the people who elected us and sent us here. This is a parliamentary democracy: the people put us here to take decisions on their behalf.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not giving way for the moment.

Enshrining the right of elected MPs to decide on matters of peace and war is an essential, vital development of hundreds of years of democratic development and parliamentary accountability. In effect, 17 countries have the rights of their Parliament to approve military action enshrined in their own laws. It should escape no one that the general public want to see an increased role for Parliament in the decision-making process around planned military action.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is the role of the Government to put our citizens' safety first, and that the Government therefore have to have the power to act in the national interest for security, and to act swiftly and confidentially, taking into account the safety of our servicemen and our allies' servicemen?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is perfectly clear from what I am proposing that Parliament should have the right to hold Government to account, and that Government should seek prior parliamentary approval before they undertake major military actions. The hon. Lady might not agree with me, but that is the joy of a parliamentary democracy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not know what has happened to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). Decades ago he was a student at the University of Oxford, and my wife always said to me subsequently, "He was a very well-behaved young man." He seems to have regressed since then. It is very unsatisfactory and he must try to improve his condition. We cannot have

people constantly ranting from a sedentary position. Let us be clear that the Leader of the Opposition will be heard, and so will every other speaker.

Jeremy Corbyn: It should not have escaped anyone that the general public want to see an increased role for Parliament in decision-making processes around military action. Talking to people on the streets of this country last weekend, I found that many said, "Why wasn't Parliament recalled? Why is Parliament not being consulted? We elected people to Parliament to do just that." We obviously have a diversity of opinion around this Chamber; that is what a democracy throws up, but I believe both that we have a responsibility to hold the Government to account and that the Government have a responsibility to come to this Chamber before they make those major decisions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I wish to make progress, so I shall not be giving way again.

Indeed, a recent Survation poll found that 54% of people thought that it was wrong of the Prime Minister to have ordered airstrikes without parliamentary approval. I urge Members of this House not to forget the duty placed on us by the Chilcot inquiry. The Chilcot inquiry was the result of the war in Iraq. It was the last of many inquiries held into that process. It was the most thorough and painstaking inquiry that there had ever been. I would have thought that it provided a salutary lesson to all of us on the importance of there being total scrutiny of what goes on, and of the Government being required to come to the House in advance of major decisions. Many of us opposed that decision, but that is not the point; the point is whether or not Parliament has the right to have a say in it. I urge those Members who are trying to intervene on me at the moment to take a break and read a bit of the Chilcot report while I am finishing my speech.

It is important that the House holds the Government of the day to account on matters of national and of global security. In 2011, William Hague, the then Foreign Secretary, outlined a commitment to enshrine in law for the future the necessity of consulting Parliament on military action. The Cabinet manual, published in 2011, also confirms the acceptance of that convention, so what we are doing is actually going back on an established position. It guarantees that the Government will observe the convention except where there is an emergency and such action would not be appropriate, thereby reserving the right for the Government to act in a matter of emergency. A war powers Act could specify at what point in decision-making processes MPs should be involved as well as retain the right of Ministers to act in an emergency, or in the country's self-defence. Yet Government policy now seems to have shifted against this process.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He turned in his speech to the question of when such approvals would be required by Parliament; he talked about emergency situations and so forth. If embedded operatives—our armed forces—were to be deployed in other countries, would parliamentary authority be required? Can he just point to where his proposal is, because the motion obviously does not contain that level of detail?

Jeremy Corbyn: The motion does not contain that level of detail because the draft Bill has not yet been prepared. Obviously, that level of detail is a matter for debate. What I am proposing is that Parliament has a fundamental power over Government to decide on issues of war and peace and the conflict that goes with them. I have made it quite clear that the caveat is in there of an overriding emergency or of a threat to people's lives.

The Government have failed to accept the case, which was put forward by the Chilcot inquiry,

“for stronger safeguards to ensure proper collective consideration by the Cabinet on decisions of vital national importance”—

most notably the decision to take military action. Those are not my words; they are the conclusions made by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's 2017 publication on the Government response to its report on Chilcot. The Committee's assessment should alarm us all. This Government have failed to introduce the proper safeguards into their Cabinet decision-making process. Why should we leave it in their hands to make these crucial decisions when they have clearly failed to learn many of the lessons of the past? This report also draws attention to concerns about the ability to ensure that Ministers take proper advice on the provision of evidence and on how decisions based on this evidence are made.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, at the very minimum, the lessons learned from the Chilcot inquiry and Iraq should be the basis of the war powers Act?

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): People were gassed.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Shelbrooke, be quiet. I know that you feel strongly, and I respect that, but I am not having you shouting out. You either undertake now to be quiet, or I strongly advise you to leave the Chamber for the rest of the debate. Stop it. You are well-intentioned and principled, but you are over-excitable and you need to contain yourself. If it requires you to take some medicament, then so be it.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) for his intervention. He is quite right: we have to learn the lessons of the past. The Iraq war is seared on the memory of every Member who was in this House at the time, and on the memories of all those millions of people outside this House who expressed the deepest concern about what was going on.

It is for this House to take matters into its own hands and to take back control—as some might put it. I am clear that, as an absolute minimum, Parliament should have enshrined in law the opportunity to ask the following questions before the Government can order planned military action: is it necessary; is it legal; what will it achieve; and what is the long-term strategy? It is difficult to argue that requiring Governments to answer those questions over matters of life and death would be anything other than a positive step. There is no more serious issue than sending our armed forces to war. It is right that Parliament has the power to support, or to stop, the Government taking planned military action.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has laid out a test, which he thinks could be met in emergency circumstances. Does that not mean that we may have a situation in which British forces need to be urgently committed, yet court action would end up determining whether or not that could happen? Would it not be wrong that judges, rather than the Cabinet, made those kinds of decisions?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not quite sure where the hon. Gentleman gets that logic from, because it certainly does not come from anything that I have said. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to have to keep interrupting. This debate must be conducted in a seemly manner, as a number of Members on both sides of the House suggested yesterday. Members must calm down. It is as simple and incontestable as that.

Jeremy Corbyn: As I was pointing out, there is no more serious issue than sending armed forces into war and what actions we, as Members of Parliament, could or should take. That is why we are elected to this House. That is what our democratic duty requires us to do.

I therefore hope that this motion will command support—

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order, and not a point of frustration. Spit it out, man.

Simon Hoare: I hope it is a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you please advise that if a statute law is passed by this place, it then becomes judicially reviewable by the courts, which was the point—

Mr Speaker: No, that is not a point of order. If the hon. Gentleman does not trust his own exegesis of the law that is his problem not mine, but it is not a matter for the Chair. He has made his own point in his own way, but he has done it in a disorderly fashion and he should not repeat the offence.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am trying to get past the point where I am saying that there are no more serious issues and decisions made by Parliament than on matters of war and peace, and the Government taking planned military action. That convention was established in 2003 and was enshrined in the Cabinet manual in 2011. The then Foreign Secretary gave every indication that he supported the principle of parliamentary scrutiny and approval of such a major step.

I have outlined the caveats in a case of overriding emergency, but it is very important that the House of Commons—one of the oldest Parliaments in the world—holds the Government to account not just on the immediate decision, but on the longer-term strategy and the implications of the actions that are taken. Going to Afghanistan and Iraq, bombing Libya and many others have long-term consequences. We all need to know what thought process has gone into those long-term consequences by the Government and the officials advising them.

Today I have tried to set out a simple democratic demand. It is not taking an opinion, one way or the other, about what the Government did last week. It is asserting the right of Parliament to assert its view over the Government. The Executive must be the servant of Parliament, not the other way around. I therefore hope that this motion will command support from both sides of the House, as we work to bind this Government and any future Government to this basic democratic principle on one of the most serious and crucial issues of foreign policy that we face. I hope that today's debate will help us in that process of bringing about a change.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not going to give way anymore because I am about to conclude my speech. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why hon. Members are cheering the end of my speech, if they want to intervene; there is no logic there, but that is their problem, not mine. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I say to Members—

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Resume your seat, Mr Harper. You do not stand when I am standing and that is the end of it. You have sought to intervene and your attempt has not been accepted. You will now remain seated. The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that he is bringing his speech to a conclusion. That is his prerogative and he will do so without being subjected to a concerted effort to stop that conclusion. You are a former Government Chief Whip. You know better than that, you can do better than that and you had better try. And I would not argue the toss with the Chair, if I were you.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is about democracy, it is about accountability and it is about making very serious decisions. That is what MPs are elected to do. It would bind this Government and future Governments to this basic democratic principle on the most serious and crucial issues of public policy that we are ever asked to take a decision on. As I said earlier, all those who were here during the debates on Iraq in 2003 remember them very well, just as they remember very well the questioning from the public about what they did and how they voted. That is why we are elected to Parliament.

I hope that the House will approve this motion on the principle that it is an assertion of the great tradition of the advancement of democratic accountability of this House on behalf of the people of this country.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call the Prime Minister, I will hear a very courteously articulated point of order from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Mr Speaker, could you give your ruling at this early stage that the vote must go with the voice? There are rumours that the Opposition are thinking of voting against their own motion, but the Leader of

the Opposition has just moved that motion. Would he therefore be entitled, under normal procedures, to do so?

Mr Speaker: The answer to that question is yes.

1.24 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I start by paying tribute to the professionalism, dedication and courage of our armed forces. As I said in the House yesterday, there is no graver decision for a Prime Minister than to commit our servicemen and women to combat operations. Understanding where authority and accountability for their deployment and employment lies is of vital importance.

Let me begin by being absolutely clear about the Government's policy in relation to the convention that has developed, because there is a fundamental difference between the policy and the perception of it that is conveyed in today's motion. The Cabinet manual states:

"In 2011, the Government acknowledged that a convention had developed in Parliament that before troops were committed the House of Commons should have an opportunity to debate the matter and said that it proposed to observe that convention except where there was an emergency and such action would not be appropriate."

More detail on the Government's position was then set out in 2016 in a written ministerial statement from the then Defence Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), who wrote:

"The exception to the convention is important to ensure that this and future Governments can use their judgment about how best to protect the security and interests of the UK. In observing the convention, we must ensure that the ability of our armed forces to act quickly and decisively, and to maintain the security of their operations, is not compromised...If we were to attempt to clarify more precisely circumstances in which we would consult Parliament before taking military action, we would constrain the operational flexibility of the armed forces and prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of those forces"—*[Official Report, 18 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 10WS.]*

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way at this stage in her speech. She may know that I raised a point of order with Mr Speaker prior to this debate to ask whether the National Security Adviser has given intelligence briefings to Members of the Labour Opposition who are not Privy Counsellors, but who were selected on the basis that they were sympathetic to the Government's airstrike policy. Will the Prime Minister confirm whether that is the case?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that any intelligence briefings have been given to Privy Council Members of this House, and that all Privy Council Members of this House have been invited to attend such briefings.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Prime Minister has talked about the possibility that the efficiency and security of British armed forces in any military action could be compromised if we were to go down the route suggested by the Leader of the Opposition. Would not that be even further magnified when our military action takes place in co-operation with, for example, the United States of America, France and perhaps several other countries?

The Prime Minister: I will be coming to the security of our allied forces as well as our own a little later in my speech.

Kevin Brennan: When the International Development Secretary gave her interpretation of this to the media recently, she said that it was always wrong to outsource decisions about war to Parliament because parliamentarians would not have, in any cases, sufficient intelligence. Was she representing the position of the Prime Minister and the Government on the convention?

The Prime Minister: I have just set out the convention. I am very clear that the Government follow that convention, but the assumption that the convention means that no decision can be taken without parliamentary approval is incorrect—it is the wrong interpretation of the convention.

I wish to make the response that I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) absolutely clear. I believe that a number of briefings have been given. Those who have been given intelligence briefings that would not be made available to Members of this House are Privy Counsellors—that is my understanding of the situation.

I share completely the principle that, in a parliamentary democracy, the elected representatives in this House should be able to debate the deployment of British military forces into combat. As I said—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman as I have just clarified my response to him.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am grateful to the Prime Minister. I do not mean to test her patience any more than I feel I have to, despite some prompting behind me. She says that it is her understanding that only Privy Counsellors received intelligence briefings from the National Security Adviser—I see that she is being passed notes along the Bench—but can she say from the Dispatch Box that no Member of Parliament who is not a Privy Counsellor received an intelligence briefing from the National Security Adviser?

The Prime Minister: Briefings have been offered to all Members of the House, not just Privy Counsellors, subsequent to action. Before action, briefing was only offered to Opposition leaders.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): We spent half an hour listening to the Leader of the Opposition talking about process. Children who have been gassed in Syria are not interested in process—they are interested in action. Since the Leader of the Opposition refused to take an intervention from me, may I ask the Prime Minister this? Does she recall any time in his 35 years in this House when he has supported any move to countenance military action or legislation to counter terrorism that sends out the clear message that illegal aggression, the likes of which we saw last week, will not be tolerated and has consequences?

The Prime Minister: My recollection is that the Leader of the Opposition has consistently opposed military action and also consistently opposed us ensuring that

our security services and our law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to be able to deal with terrorism.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way, as I am now on my best behaviour. Is this not surely a matter of degree? For instance, the United States already has a War Powers Act, but I am not aware that anybody in America has sought to invoke it over the strike that took place—[HON. MEMBERS: “They have.”] Well, I do not see that going anywhere at all.

Is it not the case that if we had sought to commit troops into combat to fight a war, as we did in Iraq in 2003, we clearly would have expected a debate and a vote in this House, but that for a targeted military strike designed to uphold international law, the approval of the House would not be necessary as a prerequisite?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his point. Indeed, I said during yesterday’s exchanges in the House that these strikes were of a particular nature. They were targeted, they were about upholding the international norm in relation to the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, and they were carried out on a legal basis that had been used by Governments previously—I will come on to that later in my speech.

Simon Hoare: Will my right hon. Friend confirm my understanding that the targets that we and our allies had in our sights were eminently manoeuvrable and that therefore the element of surprise in the attack was clearly required to maximise the opportunity for their destruction?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point that I will come on to address later in my speech.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition said many times that the duty of Members of Parliament is to represent those who elected us. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if that is the limit of our powers, it leaves the many citizens in our overseas territories and dependencies who are not represented in this place very vulnerable? Some people in this place would not have authorised military action to retake the Falkland Islands in 1982. I think, I am afraid, that some would not authorise military action to retake the Isle of Wight if it were invaded.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes his point very well.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will give way one further time and then make progress.

Karen Lee: Does the right hon. Lady think it is right that Members of this House seem to have less say in the foreign policy of this country than President Trump?

The Prime Minister: I was asked this question on a number of occasions yesterday and I answered it on a number of occasions yesterday. Let no one in this House be in any doubt that neither I nor this Government

take instructions from any President or any other national Government. When we act, we act in what we believe to be the national interest—that is our only concern. The hon. Lady might give a little more consideration to the national interest and to the importance of upholding the international norms of our rules-based order that have kept us safe over the years.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I know that the Prime Minister supports the conventions of this House and I think that the vast majority in this House will have thought that last week's action was entirely correct. Does she agree that it would be useful if, after the action has taken place, the House could demonstrate its support for the Prime Minister by having a vote on the issue?

The Prime Minister: I will come on to the role of the House in more detail, but I think that is absolutely right. The Leader of the Opposition made several references to the importance of the House holding the Government to account. That was why I came to the House at the first opportunity. It was why I answered every single question from Back Benchers yesterday, and it was why I participated in the SO24 debate that was secured by the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way one further time and then I must make some progress.

Conor Burns: I am grateful to the Prime Minister. She has spoken movingly in recent days about the burden that she carries and the responsibility she feels in committing our troops to action—her predecessors have also spoken in such terms. However, it is necessary that we are led by people who have the courage and resolve to take these decisions. What does she think would be the consequences for our national security if a future occupant of her office lacked that resolve?

The Prime Minister: These are indeed grave and difficult decisions for a Prime Minister and a Government to take, but it is important that anybody in the position of Prime Minister recognises that there will sometimes be times when it is necessary to commit our armed forces into combat in some shape or form, be that in the more direct defence of our land or our interests, in defence of international norms, or for the prevention of humanitarian suffering. It is imperative that the person who occupies this position is able and willing to take such decisions.

I share completely the principle that, in a parliamentary democracy, elected representatives in this House should be able to debate the deployment of British military forces into combat. As I said yesterday, I am deeply conscious of the gravity of these decisions and the way in which they affect all Members of the House. There are situations—not least major deployments like the Iraq war—when the scale of the military build-up requires the movement of military assets over weeks, and when it is absolutely right and appropriate for Parliament to debate military action in advance, but that does not mean that that is always appropriate. This therefore cannot and should not be codified into a parliamentary right to debate every possible overseas mission in advance.

Mr Duncan Smith *rose*—

James Heappey: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

The Prime Minister: I will make just a little more progress.

As the exception makes clear, there are also situations when coming to Parliament in advance would undermine the security of our operations or constrain our armed forces' ability to act quickly and decisively. In these situations, it is right for the Prime Minister to take the decision and then to be held accountable to Parliament for it. I give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith).

Mr Duncan Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend; I know she wishes to make progress. I was struck by the intervention by the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie) on his leader when he asked the very specific question about whether, under the motion, any change in embedded forces, for example, would deliver the necessity of a parliamentary vote. May I connect that with the question raised about legislation, because surely it would be the case that had the Government decided not to have a vote, an injunction would almost immediately follow under that legislation, thereby absolutely puncturing a hole through Government action when that was necessary and leaving complete confusion for us and our allies?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. In this area in particular, clarity of decision is crucial. It is crucial not just for Government, but for our armed forces personnel, as we are asking them to put their lives on the line for us.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. Nobody disputes the Prime Minister's ability to act outwith consultation with Parliament on an issue of national security. However, that is not the case in this instance. The President of the United States tweeted the week before the action to suggest that it would happen, and the Prime Minister's own Cabinet meeting indicated that the Government would be supportive on Thursday. She could have perfectly well recalled Parliament on Thursday. Is it not the case that she was just afraid of losing a vote, and that is why she did not recall Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I will come on to the specific issue of the vote that the hon. Gentleman would have preferred to see on the action that took place last week. He says that nobody is in any doubt of the Government's need to be able to act by themselves and make their own decision on a matter of national security. Having heard the Leader of the Opposition's speech, I am not sure that that statement flows for every Member of the House. As I understood it, the Leader of the Opposition was saying that it should always be the case that Parliament takes a decision in advance of the Government taking action.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will make some progress. I want to set out for the House today four fundamental reasons why this exception is right and why it applied in the case of our military action last weekend.

[The Prime Minister]

First, coming to Parliament before undertaking military action could compromise the effectiveness of our operations and the safety of British servicemen and women. In the case of our actions last weekend, the Syrian regime has one of the most sophisticated air defence systems in the world today. To counter such a system, it is vital to confuse the enemy as much as possible and to conceal the timing and targets of any planned attack. For example, if they had known even the category of target we had identified—in other words, our narrow focus on chemical weapons—that would have allowed them to concentrate rather than disperse their air defences. They could also have pre-empted our attack by dispersing their chemical weapons stocks, instead of leaving them at the target sites that we had identified.

Our ability to exploit uncertainty was a critical part of the operation, and that uncertainty was also a critical part of its success. We know that the Syrian regime was not aware in advance of our detailed plans. If I had come here to the House to make the case for action in advance, I could not have concealed our plans and retained that uncertainty. I would quite understandably have faced questions about the legality of our action. The only way I could have reassured the House would have been to set out in advance—as I did yesterday after the event—the limited, targeted and proportionate nature of our proposed action. I would have faced questions about what aircraft and weapons we were planning to use, when the operation was going to take place, how long it was going to last and what we were going to do.

All of that would have provided invaluable information that would have put our armed forces at greater risk and greatly increased the likelihood of the regime being able to shoot down our missiles and get their chemical weapons away from our targets. I was not prepared to compromise their safety and the efficacy of the mission. [Interruption.] To the shadow Foreign Secretary, who from a sedentary position is saying that it is nonsense to argue about the security of our armed forces, I say that that should be at the forefront of our thinking.

Clive Efford: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. Nine days have elapsed since the attack on Douma. The President of the United States tweeted about it, and there was a highly publicised Cabinet meeting on the morning of 12 April. On that day, comments of the Prime Minister in that Cabinet meeting were reported in the press. No one here would have asked for secret details of the attacks. We would have asked about the long-term strategy for getting people around the table to discuss the future. She set out yesterday her objective in this attack, but is that attack likely to increase the possibility of getting those people around the table to bring a solution to the problem in Syria? No, it is not.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the strikes were undertaken because of the concerns about the use of chemical weapons. They were not about the longer term issues of the resolution of the conflict and civil war in Syria, and they were not about the issue of regime change. They were about degrading a chemical weapons capability and deterring the use of those chemical weapons.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that the comments she is making reflect accurately a Ministry of Justice report published under the previous Labour Government in 2009, which stated that any relaxation of prerogative powers would “dangerously” weaken our ability to respond in a crisis?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point in quoting from that report. We have to be able to retain the flexibility we need to make the decisions necessary for our national security and our national interest and to act in the way that we have.

James Heappey: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. She knows that the decisions she often has to take are in response to very dynamic security and military situations. Legislating in this place for the mission brings with it an inflexibility that would be very unhelpful when targets change, missions change and rules of engagement sometimes need to be adjusted. She cannot allow her freedom of decision making to be limited in such a way.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; it is important to have that freedom and flexibility. May I say how striking that comment is coming from him, as I believe he has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan?

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: No, I am going to make progress. Quite a few Members wish to speak in the debate, and I have taken a lot of interventions.

The second reason is the nature of the information that I see as Prime Minister, along with the National Security Council and the Cabinet. The Government make use of a wide range of sources of information, both those in the public domain and secret intelligence. In this case, drawing on the lessons of the past, we made a rigorous assessment of the available open-source material and intelligence about the Douma attack. Indeed, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) looked me in the eye and asked me to tell him that it was the Syrian regime that was responsible, I could do so in part because of the intelligence and assessment I had seen, and because I had discussed that intelligence and assessment with senior security and military officials, the National Security Council and Cabinet.

In the post-Iraq era, it is natural for people to ask questions about the evidence base for our military actions, including when we cite intelligence. They want to see all the information themselves. But we have an obligation to protect the safety and security of our sources. We must maintain secrecy if our intelligence is to be effective now and in the future. We have obligations to our partners to protect the intelligence they share with us, just as they protect intelligence we share with them, and we have to be judicious even in explaining the types of intelligence we use in any given case, or risk giving our adversaries vital clues about where our information comes from.

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

The Prime Minister: No, I am going to make some more progress.

The Government have access to all that information, but Parliament does not and cannot. This is not a question of whether we take Parliament into our confidence. It is a question of whether we take our adversaries into our confidence by sharing that material in a public forum. Officials have briefed Opposition leaders on Privy Council terms, and I have set out to the House elements underpinning our assessment, but our intelligence and assessment cannot be shared in full with Parliament. It is my responsibility to decide the way forward based on all the intelligence and information available to Government. I should make the decision as Prime Minister with the support of the Cabinet, and Parliament should hold me to account for that decision.

Layla Moran: I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. I found the statement on the evidence for it being Assad's regime that carried out the chemical attack, on the type of helicopter and the movements, very compelling. Would she have been able to share just that evidence prior to the attack?

The Prime Minister: I was able to share more evidence with the House after the attack than I would have been able to share before the attack, and it is not possible to share with the House all the intelligence on which we base our judgments.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: No, I am going to make some progress.

The third reason is our need to work together with our closest allies. A year ago, following the despicable sarin attack at Khan Shaykhun, the US immediately sought to deter further chemical weapons attacks by launching 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at the airfield from which the Khan Shaykhun atrocity attack took place. But Assad and his regime have not stopped their use of chemical weapons, so this weekend's strikes needed to be significantly larger than the US action a year ago and to be specifically designed to have a greater impact on the regime's capability and willingness to use chemical weapons. That was firmly in the British national interest. Working together with America and France, and doing so at pace, was fundamental to achieving that effect.

If I had come to the House in advance of this operation to set out the totality of our effort, I would also have had to share with Parliament the breadth of our allies' plans, for this was a combined operation where the totality of our effort was key to delivering the effect. Not only would this have constrained their flexibility to act swiftly, but it would have fundamentally undermined the effectiveness of their action and endangered the security of our American and French allies. In doing so, we would have failed to stand up to Assad in the face of this latest atrocity. We would have failed to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading Assad's chemical weapons capability and deterring their future use, and we would have failed to uphold and defend the global consensus that says these weapons should never, ever be used.

The fourth reason is that the legal basis for UK action has previously been agreed by Parliament. As the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) said so movingly during the statement yesterday, there is a long tradition on both sides of this House that has considered that military action on an exceptional basis—where necessary and proportionate, and as a last resort—to avert an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe is permissible under international law. The three criteria that I set out in my statement yesterday are the same three criteria used as the legal justification for the UK's role in the NATO intervention in Kosovo. As I also explained, our intervention in 1991 with the US and France and in 1992 with the US to create safe havens and enforce the no-fly zones in Iraq following the Gulf war were also justified on the basis of humanitarian intervention.

So it was right for me, as Prime Minister—with the full support of the Cabinet, and drawing on the advice of security and military officials—to take the decision on this military strike last weekend, and for Parliament to be able to hold me to account for it. By contrast, a war powers Act would remove that capability from a Prime Minister and remove the vital flexibility from the convention that has been established, for it would not be possible to enshrine a convention in a way that is strong and meaningful but none the less flexible enough to deal with what are, by definition, unpredictable circumstances.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I am grateful for the Prime Minister's time. Should this motion be passed would it mean theoretically that if we are attacked anywhere in the world, we would have to come to Parliament before we could act in retaliation?

The Prime Minister: That would not be the upshot of the motion before the House today, but it could be the upshot of a war powers Act of the type suggested by the Leader of the Opposition.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): If consulting Parliament in advance of this military action against the Syrian regime would inevitably have compromised operational details and intelligence in the way the Prime Minister suggests, what was it about the debate that took place in 2013 on possible military action in Syria that would have compromised the same details had the vote gone the other way?

The Prime Minister: There was a rather different set of circumstances in 2013, when that vote was taken by the House.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): As a former soldier, may I paint a picture in which British hostages are taken and a rescue mission is needed? As I understand it from the Opposition, we would have to come to this place before such a mission was launched—or we might have to—if the law worked in that way, but the best time to rescue them would actually be when we in this place are talking.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My understanding is that he has understood the potential consequences of what is being proposed by the Opposition.

[The Prime Minister]

Let me be absolutely clear what such a war powers Act would mean. It would mean that many smaller scale, timely and targeted interventions—like the action we have taken to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading Syria's chemical weapons capability and deterring their use—became unviable. They would be unviable because it would significantly reduce the effectiveness of any operations and endanger the safety of our servicemen and women.

As David Cameron stated to the House back in 2014, "it is important to reserve the right that if there were a critical British national interest at stake or there were the need to act to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, you could act immediately and explain to the House of Commons afterwards."—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 1265.]

Put simply, making it unlawful for Her Majesty's Government to undertake any such military intervention without a vote would seriously compromise our national security, our national interests and the lives of British citizens at home and abroad—and for as long as I am Prime Minister, that will never be allowed to happen.

Mr Speaker, before I make my concluding remarks, may I apologise to all those participating in this debate? I will have to leave the House after I have spoken in order to have a meeting with Cyril Ramaphosa, who has taken over as the Head of Government in South Africa, but Members will understand that it is important for me to do so.

I realise that for some in this House, and especially for those who have not had to do what I have had to do, the attractive purity of a democratic principle that Parliament should always decide may still appeal more than the practice of how to ensure an effective military operation that delivers in our national interest. Notwithstanding this disagreement, however, I think two things are clear. First, while we may disagree over my decision not to recall Parliament, over my decision to commit our forces in combat on this mission and over the very principle that I should be able to make such a decision, I hope we can agree over this: from the time I spent at the Dispatch Box yesterday, no one can doubt my commitment as Prime Minister to being held to account by this House for the decisions I have taken. Secondly, the mood of the House yesterday was unquestionable: we have the support of the House for the measures that we took to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deterring its future use. A clear majority of the House believes we did the right thing.

1.56 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I suggest to the Government that we need to reflect very carefully on the important matters we are debating? I respectfully suggest that the Government should consider bringing forward a Bill that would provide the protections many of us in the House are arguing for today. I say that because legitimate questions are being raised about what the scope of that Bill or Act should be so that the Government, in exceptional circumstances, still have the power to act. We are not talking about a set of provisions that binds the Government and prevents

them from acting in all circumstances; that would be ludicrous, and I do not believe that anybody would support that.

May I say that, as we have this debate, we must keep at the front of our minds the humanitarian situation in Syria? All of us in this House must have a desire to work together, and to work together internationally, to bring the war and the suffering in Syria to an end. May I also say that we ought to commend our armed forces for the way in which they have conducted themselves? We can be grateful that those who engaged in the activity last week, whether or not we agreed with it, returned to their bases in safety.

It is important at this time to reflect on the principles in this debate. This place may have no constitution, but it has long-held conventions that are based on precedent. In 2013, Parliament was recalled to debate the UK's military response to a chemical attack in Syria. The UK's political system has been turned upside down since then, and that appears to include parliamentary procedure and parliamentary sovereignty. The timeline of events last week showed our Prime Minister chasing the President's timetable, rather than planning a recall. Parliament should authorise military action, and it is a disgrace that the Prime Minister appeared beholden to the US President, instead of to the UK Parliament. [Interruption.] I hear some Conservative Members saying "Rubbish", but it is important that we examine these matters.

Let me say to the House that it is my contention that, if we had not been on recess last week, we would have had such a discussion—the nub of the problem, above all else, was the failure of the Government to recall Parliament—and there is no way that this House would have been able to avoid a debate on what was happening in Syria, particularly in the light of the tweets coming from the US President.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I was out last week in my constituency knocking on doors. As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, my constituency is Washington and Sunderland West? My constituents asked me, "Why weren't the views of the constituents of Washington UK taken into consideration, rather than the views of President Trump of Washington DC?"

Ian Blackford: I find myself in strong agreement with the hon. Lady, because the fact of the matter is that everybody else was discussing the Syrian situation last week; hardly any other subject has been discussed in our media. When all our constituents are rightly concerned about the humanitarian situation, the only people—the only ones—who have not had a voice are Members of this Parliament. That is to be deeply regretted.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is not acceptable and not good enough for the Prime Minister not to seek parliamentary approval before getting our brave servicemen and women involved in a military conflict? As he rightly says, thanks to the tweets of the stable genius, hundreds of millions of people were debating the issue in their house, but it seems that this House is the only one where we are not allowed to debate.

Ian Blackford: I think the hon. Gentleman is correct. Let me say this respectfully: we are living in challenging times; we all agree on that. We had the attack in Salisbury, and it is important that we tried to reach as broad a consensus as we could have done on that matter. I simply say to the House that it is in all our interests that we are able to debate these matters. Nobody is talking about tying the hands of the Prime Minister; all we are asking is that democracy can take place.

Chris Philp: First, we should keep it in mind that last week's action was limited and targeted, not a more general engagement. To the right hon. Gentleman's specific question on why Parliament was not recalled, let me provide this answer. First, to have provided full justification to the House would have entailed the disclosure of confidential intelligence. Secondly, it would have inhibited our ability to co-ordinate with international allies. Thirdly, it would have given our adversary some sense of the—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Ian Blackford: I have to say that that is wrong on so many levels. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we met, we discussed and we voted in 2015 to take action against Daesh. Nobody is saying that intelligence matters have to be declared to Members of Parliament—of course not. We are talking about the principles of taking action. Do not hide behind the smokescreen of saying that intelligence information has to be shared. It does not, and nobody would expect that.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Prime Minister has said that this so-called targeted action would not increase tensions in the region, yet she could not give any guarantees about retaliation from different parties. Does my right hon. Friend not agree that that is exactly the kind of thing we would have debated had this come to Parliament?

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. I wish to see all of us—the United Kingdom—taking a leadership role in making sure that we can get rid of the scourge of chemical weapons, but, as I mentioned in my introductory remarks, we need to work together in the interests of the Syrian people to break the logjam of the Geneva talks. That should be our biggest priority in order to do—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I must apologise to the House. I know that many Members want to speak and I want to make progress if I can.

I remind the House that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), the Father of the House, said yesterday that

“once President Trump had announced to the world what he was proposing, a widespread debate was taking place everywhere—including among many Members of Parliament in the media. However, there was no debate in Parliament.”—[*Official Report*, 16 April 2018; Vol. 639, c. 47.]

We should listen to the wisdom of the Father of the House.

As the President tweeted reckless comments, simply heightening tensions, the Scottish National party immediately called for the Prime Minister to recall

Parliament for last Saturday. We have been clear: any proposed change to the role of UK forces in Syria must be subject to a vote in Parliament. Cabinet was recalled. Why wasn't Parliament?

There is no good answer to that question, because the Prime Minister knows she should have done so. As I have said, precedent has been set. In 2013, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, recalled Parliament for a debate and vote following a suspected chemical attack on Syrian civilians in the suburbs of Damascus. After the 2013 vote, Professor Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute commented:

“It is now hard to see how any UK Government could undertake significant military action without the support of Parliament, or indeed of the wider public.”

We know what a lack of rigorous analysis and thought can lead to. We must—absolutely must—have learned the lessons from the Iraq war, and we must fully endorse the conclusions of the Chilcot report. A full debate in Parliament would have allowed for many questions about the UK's military action and role to be asked. For example, what is the Government's long-term strategy for Syria?

James Heappey: Chilcot has been cited a number of times by Opposition Members. The Iraq war was voted on in this place, but on the basis of incomplete information. What intelligence would the right hon. Gentleman propose to compromise to Members of the House so that they could make a better decision and what analysis has he made of the impact of sharing that intelligence on the operational security of those who would prosecute the mission thereafter?

Ian Blackford: None. How do we— [*Interruption.*] Well, look. I am trying to be— [*Interruption.*] I see the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) waving her arms. I have already made the point, as the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey) would know if he had been listening to what I have been saying, that I do not expect the Government to have to share intelligence information with Members of Parliament. Let me also be clear, for the absence of doubt: I accept the case that has been put that the Syrian regime is responsible for the chemical weapons attack. I am happy with the explanation that has been given, and, in my case, I have been made aware of some of the intelligence information.

Let us not say that Parliament cannot take action on the basis of being told what it can be told. But it does not need to be told what is sensitive intelligence information. That is the way Parliament has worked, and we are asking that parliamentary democracy continues to take place.

Taking military action is not easy; we accept that. Finding a way through the morass in Syria and offering hope to the people is more difficult, but that is an issue that, as part of any plan for military action, has to be discussed.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con) *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I happily give way to my learned friend.

Mr Grieve: Is there not this difficulty? If we in the House seek to debate, in anticipation, a military action that is of a high level of specificity, in reality, where the Government cannot explain the specifics, we will be in

[Mr Grieve]

considerable difficulty having a sensible debate on that subject. Let us look at this realistically. That is in fact one of the issues that has to be addressed. I hope I may have a chance to speak about that later.

Ian Blackford: I am grateful for that intervention, but no one is asking for the Government to be specific to that degree about the action being proposed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I will not take any more interventions because I must move on.

I have already talked about what happened in 2015, when the House voted on taking action against Daesh. Nobody is talking about compromising operational activity; this is about the principle of Parliament giving its consent to military action. That is what we are talking about.

I must make progress. Preparing the groundwork for peace has to be a fundamental part of any proposed military action, as well as developing a clear and coherent plan that addresses the humanitarian crisis. It is a damning tale that the UK spent 13 times as much money on bombing Libya than it did on rebuilding the country at the end of the conflict. We must not be dragged into the reckless rhetoric of the President of the United States when he claims “mission accomplished”.

I call on the Government urgently to tell the House, by means of a statement, what their long-term strategy is for achieving peace in Syria and helping the nation rebuild after the war.

On Saturday, we were presented with the legal advice the Prime Minister relied on to justify Saturday’s airstrikes. I repeat my comments from yesterday: the SNP has grave concerns about the extent of the legal advice. As I noted yesterday, in the absence of a UN resolution or self-defence, the two clear-cut legal grounds for attack, the Prime Minister’s legal reliance is based on averting a humanitarian crisis. Syria is the most besieged and bombed place on earth right now. It is not easy to see how adding war planes and airstrikes to the Syrian skies averts further humanitarian suffering: thousands dead, millions fleeing for their lives, 400,000 civilians still trapped in appalling conditions, deprived of food, medicine and basic aid, and over 13 million civilians in desperate need of humanitarian aid. I heard the cry about refugees—yes, our responsibility for refugees. We can look back with pride to the Kindertransport in the months leading up to the second world war, when 10,000 children were let into this country. Where is that spirit of humanity to deal with the crisis in Syria today?

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is said that many a true word is spoken in jest. I think it was the comedian Frankie Boyle who said that the UK cares very much about the Syrians until they reach a beach. We have to make sure that we put as much effort into refugees as is being put into dropping bombs.

Ian Blackford: Absolutely. The situation on the ground in Syria is desperate. We cannot and must not look at Syria through the narrow prism of military action. There are fantastic people, groups and organisations on

the ground just getting through each day and they deserve the international community’s full support. I pay tribute in particular to the White Helmets, who have not only saved so many lives but have continuously run into danger to protect civilians.

We must work with the UN and international partners to ensure all action in Syria meets with international law. I have grave concerns that the Prime Minister did not wait for OPCW inspectors to complete their visit and investigations in Douma before taking a decision to respond. Many countries around the world place constitutional controls on the use of military power. The SNP believes in a triple lock on military deployments, based on the principles that military action would need to be: in accordance with the principles of the UN charter; properly agreed by Government; and approved by Parliament. If I may say so, those are principles that any independent Scottish Government would adhere to. Those of us on the SNP Benches believe that the time has come for a war powers Act. A long-standing policy of the SNP, we believe it will stop situations such as that we saw last week, where Parliament is completely bypassed in a reckless fashion.

Parliamentary approval was the Conservative party’s position not so long ago. In 2011, the then Foreign Secretary William Hague stated that the UK Government planned to

“enshrine in law for the future the necessity of consulting Parliament on military action.”—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 799.]

Then the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee identified

“an urgent need for greater clarity on Parliament’s role in decisions to commit British forces to armed conflict abroad”.

It recommended that the Government should in the first instance bring forward a draft parliamentary resolution for consultation and for decision by the end of 2011. As we all know, that did not happen.

In conclusion, we on the SNP Benches warmly welcome the support of the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward a war powers Act. I hope that we can work together—indeed, across the House with Government Members, too—to create a war powers Act for this place.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the number of people wishing to take part in this debate, I am afraid it is necessary with immediate effect to impose a time limit of five minutes on each Back-Bench speech.

2.14 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will endeavour to be as swift as I possibly can.

The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) has, I think, just punched a hole in his own argument. He responded to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), a former Attorney General, by assuring us that in any debate about some putative military action nobody would ask the Government to reveal specifics. I am sorry, but that is what this place does: we ask about specifics. He expects to debate forthcoming military

action when the Government would be reluctant to reveal targets, the objectives of the operation and the nature of the deployment. That is ridiculous. I will come back to that point in a minute.

I rise as Chair of the Parliamentary Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which covers both the question of strategic thinking in government and the question of the relationship between the Government and Parliament. My predecessor Committee produced three reports on strategic thinking in government and I challenge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who is in his place, on this. The Government have listened to the arguments and developed their capacity for strategic thinking, but the published literature of government is way behind the curve in dealing with the situations we now face. That underlines how we have to a large extent been asleep and complacent about the security we enjoy in this world. We are effectively now confronted by two great powers who are intent on subverting the international legal order. The problem in Syria is just a symptom of the superpower conflict that is already taking place, and which is simply not reflected in the 2015 strategic defence and security review or the 2015 national security review. I think we need to attend to those matters with some urgency.

I wish to concentrate on the more immediate question about the relationship between Government and Parliament. It is a complete misconception that there is an established constitutional convention that Parliament votes on the question of foreign deployments. This is a relatively new fashion. The Cabinet manual says that, but the Cabinet manual has no constitutional status whatever. It has no legal force. It is merely the expression of the opinion of a particular Prime Minister at a particular time—it was not even drafted by this Prime Minister—and it is vague.

The basis of the relationship between Government and Parliament is that Parliament controls laws and the supply of money to the Executive. Parliament is required to give its confidence to the Government in office for them to continue in office. It scrutinises Government decisions and holds Ministers accountable. However, I say to the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition that accountability is not the same thing as control. This Parliament does not control the Executive. We do not run the country. We hold the Government accountable. Parliament should not seek to directly control the decisions of Ministers.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Would my hon. Friend not go a little further and agree that if we crossed that boundary and made this into the Executive, we would actually reduce the ability of this place to hold the Government to account because we ourselves are forced, on a three-line Whip, to vote for them?

Mr Jenkin: It is ironic that the decision to go to war in Iraq is continually held up as an example of how these decisions should be made, when in fact the determination of the then Prime Minister to bring the decision to Parliament actually blurred the whole debate. It made the debate about a whole lot of factors that were irrelevant to the question of whether it was a sensible decision to go to war in Iraq. It also seems ironic to hold that up as an example of how decisions should be made when so many Members of that House

regret taking that decision. It is easier to hold the Government accountable if we say, “You the Government make the decision and we will judge you on your performance after the event.”

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister received her seals of office from Her Majesty, she did not just take on the right to decide when, where and how our armed forces should be deployed. She took on the obligation, intrinsic to her office, to exercise her judgment, on proper advice and in consultation with her Cabinet, on military deployments of this nature and then to bring those decisions to this House when she has made them.

The Chilcot report has been raised. My Committee has considered it, and we made recommendations on how Government procedures might be improved to make sure that legal advice is not concealed from the Cabinet and that proper procedures are followed in Government. In particular, on the basis of a proposal from the Better Government Initiative, we recommended that it would be a good idea if the Cabinet Secretary had some mechanism to call out a Prime Minister who was deliberately bypassing proper procedures in Government. The Government have so far rejected that recommendation, but I hope they will continue to consider how we can be reassured that the proper procedures are being followed in Government. However, my right hon. Friend’s commitment to her sense of accountability and proper procedure seems to be absolutely unchallengeable—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Mr George Howarth—*[Interruption.]* Order. I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), but his speech is over. We are greatly obliged to him.

2.20 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I start by saying from a purely personal point of view that I accept that, on occasions, the use of military force is necessary to achieve humanitarian aims. Regardless of which Benches we sit on, I think most of us in this House accept that that probably has to be correct as a principle. What most of us are now debating are the circumstances in which we take such decisions, and in the few minutes available to me, I will concentrate my remarks on that specific point.

It is worth starting from the perspective—a lot of right hon. and hon. Members have argued this—that the United Nations should be front and centre in the decision-making process. In principle, that sounds like a good thing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) quoted articles 3 and 28 of the universal declaration of human rights, which the UN General Assembly adopted in 1948, and they bear repetition. Article 3 states:

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

Article 28 states:

“Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”

They are laudable objectives that all of us could easily subscribe to. The difficulty we have with the United Nations, however, is that the way in which Russia can exercise its veto at the Security Council—as it does

[Mr George Howarth]

regularly and repeatedly—means that the achievement of the high ideals set out by the United Nations in 1948 becomes increasingly difficult when one permanent member of the Security Council effectively prevents those ideals being carried out in practice through the use of a veto.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making an extraordinarily central point. Does he agree that the whole structure of the P5 essentially depends on the assumption that all permanent members of the Security Council have it in mind to enforce the international rules-based order? When that breaks down, we have a fundamental problem.

Mr Howarth: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who I think is just saying what I said using different words. In so far as that is the argument that I am using, I accept what he is saying.

Before I move on to another matter, I want to say a further word about Russia. There is a view in some quarters that Russia is, if not benign, then a neutral force in all these matters—[*Interruption.*] I said on the part of some people. Although the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries) is shaking her head, I would never have thought such of her. However, some people do genuinely and sincerely believe that. I spent 11 years as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee—I resigned because I thought that was long enough—and members of that Committee find out some things they cannot talk openly about. However, one thing I will say is that I have seen in real time how Russia tries repeatedly to interfere with the apparatus of state through cyber-attacks and even in terms of the confidentiality of products in the defence industry. Any idea that Russia is this friendly state that we can all rely on is frankly not borne out by the facts.

I want to conclude with a word about what the Prime Minister had to say earlier. First, she said that she came to the House at the first possible opportunity, but I ask the question: did she? Secondly, she referred to intelligence that cannot be shared with Parliament, and I will deal with each point separately.

Unlike the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), I accept that the convention that the Prime Minister has relied upon to justify what she did is appropriate. It says, basically, that

“parliament will be given the opportunity to debate the decision to commit troops to armed conflict and, except in emergency situations, that debate would take place before they are committed.”

I accept that there have to be exceptions, and any legislation or convention would have to allow for that fact. I would argue, however, that the Prime Minister could have recalled Parliament last week. We could have had a debate not about the intelligence that was involved, but about the open-source materials that she referred to, and this Parliament could, on the basis of a general resolution about humanitarian aims, have come to a conclusion, so I reject that assertion on the Prime Minister's part.

Mr Speaker: Order. Has the right hon. Gentleman completed his oration?

Mr Howarth: I have.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to him.

2.27 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Parliament has done its correct duty—admittedly assisted by you, Mr Speaker—in ensuring that there were six hours of debate yesterday and a further three hours of debate today, but these constitutional issues are not new. Indeed, this matter is at the heart of the Glorious Revolution, and one of the clauses of the Bill of Rights, which is still our law, states that

“the raising or keeping a standing Army within the Kingdome in time of Peace unlesse it be with Consent of Parlyament is against Law.”

That is why every five years an Armed Forces Bill is passed—to ensure that the armed forces that are available to the Executive are approved by Parliament.

This last happened in 2016 when the Armed Forces Act was renewed. On that occasion, the Bill passed Second Reading without a Division, and it passed Third Reading without a Division. There was uniform consent in this House that the armed services should exist on a similar basis to that on which they have existed since 1689. The Leader of the Opposition did not choose to put down an amendment to put any limits on how the armed services could operate. He did not choose to put down an amendment to say that the Government could not act without the specific consent of Parliament. At every stage, the Bill was passed, and it recognised the proper constitutional settlement and the separation of powers. An Executive and a legislature are different things and have different responsibilities.

As hon. Members know, I have the highest respect for the leader of the Scottish National party in this House—the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford)—but I think that he made an error in his speech when he suggested that this House ought to give pre-approval, because the job of the House is to hold the Executive to account, not to try to run the Executive by remote control.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: If it is the Executive's idea to go to war or engage in military action, should not this House hold the Executive to account for their thoughts, ideas and policies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Executive are being held to account today. The Prime Minister spent six hours yesterday being held to account in this House and a further hour today.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

Mr Rees-Mogg: I give way to the hon. Lady—my neighbour.

Wera Hobhouse: I am very grateful to my neighbour for giving way. Surely this debate is about not a collective decision on the action that has been taken and on putting the armed forces at risk, but a process that we in this House are collectively happy with and agreed on. Clearly the fact that we are having this debate means that there is not a collective agreement about the process.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, as the Leader of the Opposition was earlier, to say that today's debate is about process. What I am trying to say is that the process is established, has been established

for centuries and is highly effective. The Executive are only the Executive as long as they command the confidence of this House. It would have been open to the Opposition, instead of going for a Standing Order No. 24 debate, to have asked for a vote of confidence in Her Majesty's Government. I think that that would have been the right thing to do, having listened carefully to the Leader of the Opposition's speech. The Opposition fundamentally do not have confidence—or their leadership does not—in the making of this decision. We would then have seen whether this House had confidence in the Executive to make the decisions that are the legitimate business of the Executive.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Rees-Mogg: I will not give way again because time is short.

If that were to happen, we would know that the use of force had not been agreed by this House, but it is a retrospective agreement. This is established in our constitution and has been for the longest time, and that is very important, because Executives have the confidential information that allows them to make decisions. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber asked why the Cabinet was called when Parliament was not. The obvious reason is that we have Cabinet government in this country. The Prime Minister cannot act on her own; she has to act with the consent of the Cabinet. That is how our constitution functions.

Ian Blackford: Would not the hon. Gentleman concede that in the case of any military action since the Iraq war, the consent of Parliament has been sought on every occasion before troops have been engaged?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is not correct. With the bombing raids on Libya, retrospective consent was given by this House; it was not sought in advance. That is the issue that goes to the heart of this matter. Yes, we have a flexible constitution, but it is not right to say that we have no constitution. The flexible constitution allows a Government to come to this House when they are considering certain types of action, when no secret information needs to be given out, and when there might be a long-term plan for an invasion or whatever there is. It also allows the Government the flexibility to act when times are urgent and business is pressing, and when the information is of the greatest sensitivity. That was why I made the point that it was right and inevitable that the Cabinet should be consulted, as that is where power rests, but it is absurd to suggest that the House of Commons could give its consent. In fact, the only way that the House of Commons can consent is by legislation, and then we would need to go to their other end of the Palace and ask their lordships as well. By the time we had passed a law saying that we could engage in conflict, the whole conflict would be over.

The issue is that the Armed Forces Act 2016 already covers this question, and that Bill was passed unanimously. This House gives confidence in the Government and controls supply. The armed forces cannot go to war not only if the Armed Forces Bill has not been passed, but if supply is not voted to allow the Army, Navy and Air Force to go about their business. That is where we have control every year over the actions of our military. We have it quinquennially and we have it annually, and we have confidence or not in the Government.

That is our correct and established constitutional situation. There are ways for the Opposition to deal with a Government of whom they do not approve, and that is through a vote of confidence. That they have not chosen to go down that route shows that the opposition is of a pacifist tone. That might be honourable, and it might be noble, but it is different from upsetting our constitution merely to entrench inaction.

2.35 pm

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): My approach to this question was well captured by some of the independent-minded Labour Back Benchers yesterday, and particularly by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) when she said “If only the Prime Minister had asked it of me, I would have been inclined to support her.” The Prime Minister did not ask, and as a result she missed a significant opportunity to build consensus in this place and support in the country. She has clearly received other advice.

I was very struck in the middle of last week by the avalanche of editorials—notably one by the Prime Minister's former colleague, the editor of the *Evening Standard*—saying that of course Parliament must not debate this issue. It had nothing to do with high-minded constitutional principles or military secrecy; the argument was, “We might lose, and if we lose that will be terrible for our prestige vis-à-vis France.” There are of course more serious arguments, which have been aired and which were put by the Prime Minister, on the grounds of secrecy and national security. I respect them. I am a Privy Counsellor and have benefited from the briefings that have been available.

We are here on an issue of trust. I like to think that in this House and in the country we have progressed beyond the poisonous legacy of the Iraq war. We are not in the position of the United States, where the President is at war with his own intelligence agencies. We have trust and should have trust in the advice that is given. If the Prime Minister had any doubt about that, she should have been reassured three to four weeks ago when she came to the House to address the Salisbury question and said, “Look, there are things I cannot explain. There are facts and information.” What happened was that almost everybody on this side of the House—nationalists, Liberal Democrats and Labour—except for those on the Opposition Front Bench, took her word, and that was as it should have been. She could have done that on this occasion, but because she has chosen to ignore a practice established by Mrs Thatcher, Tony Blair and David Cameron—admittedly in difficult circumstances—we are now in the position of having to talk about legislative remedies for something that should have been accepted on the basis of trust.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I do not understand the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument. He has admitted that there are circumstances that would mean that the House could not be fully informed. The House would therefore be having a debate and making a decision that, by definition, would be ill informed. What is the sense in that?

Sir Vince Cable: Of course, not all information could be made available. That is why having trust in the Prime Minister, which I do as an individual, and in our security

[*Sir Vince Cable*]

services and military, as I do, are absolutely imperative. If that were in place, the House would have a mature debate on the principle. I think that the Prime Minister would have had a significant majority had she followed that path.

Mr Nigel Evans: When the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the coalition Government, he made decisions as part of that Government. He is now part of the legislature. Does he not accept that there is a distinction? He says that he trusts the Prime Minister, and surely that is what today's debate is all about.

Sir Vince Cable: I am also well aware that I have had to fight my way back into the legislature and I am no longer a member of the Government. When I was a member of the Government, I supported military intervention in this place. I think that, on that occasion, Parliament got it wrong. I also think that it got it wrong over the Iraq war, but the process was a necessary discipline. It is a pity that we are now having to talk about legislative remedies when there was a perfectly good and sound convention that successive Prime Ministers were following, but this one is not.

That is all I wish to say about the process issues, but I want to raise several specific questions of substance that I do not think were dealt with in yesterday's debate. The first, which was raised by me and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), is whether this is a one-off operation, or a continuous series of strikes for which we need to be prepared. That is not an academic question. A lot of open-source material suggests that the number of chemical attacks in Syria is far greater than the number—five, I think—that was cited yesterday. The White Helmets, the Syrian human rights organisation, has come up with the figure of 213 in the last five years. In other words, every week the Syrian armed forces are using chemical weapons. Low-level divisional commanders are using crude chemicals, notably chlorine, and it strikes me as being perfectly plausible that they will do so again.

The question, then, is this: what is the threshold at which we once again intervene? Is it any use of chemical weapons? Is it a certain number of deaths? Is it the indignation of the President of the United States when he has seen something on television? What is the threshold for continuing involvement in this struggle? This is all the more reason why we need parliamentary authorisation for continuing action.

My second question, which relates indirectly to that, is about the role of the President of the United States. I regard the United States as an ally and a friendly country with which we have long and strong bonds, but I think that we all have problems with a President who is erratic, capricious and regarded with open contempt by the public officials who have worked with him, and who even now, in the middle of this crisis, seems to regard President Assad and President Putin as less of a problem than Stormy Daniels and Robert Mueller.

The question is, in our continuing dealings with the major power of the western world, where do we go? We know that in the last few days the President has introduced into his Administration John Bolton, who is absolutely open about the fact that if there are further strikes he

will wish to include Iranian targets—we know that will inflame the issue in relation to Israel—and who wants to derail the agreement on nuclear weapons with Iran. I would like some assurance at the end of the debate that the British Government are holding fast with France and the rest of the European Union in honouring and supporting that agreement, and are not being over-influenced by the American Administration.

My third and final question relates to Russia. In her statement, the Prime Minister linked Salisbury with the chemical weapons attack. It is very striking that while we have followed the United States—perhaps rightly—in military action, we have not followed the Americans in imposing penal sanctions on oligarchs and stock market dealings. The impact is blatantly obvious. The Russians must be asking themselves, “Why haven't they done it? Are they afraid of retaliation? Are there vested interests in the City?” That is the kind of question to which we need an answer.

We should have had answers to all those questions last week. I hope that we will improve the processes of the House to ensure that they are given in future.

2.42 pm

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): I observe that in this debate, for all that it has become heated at times, we agree on much. We all agree that decisions to take military action must be brought to the House and explained to the House in detail as soon as possible after they have been made. We all agree that the Prime Minister and other Ministers must be held to account by the House, as often as the House wants, for the decisions that they have made in regard to that military action. We all, I think, agree that decisions on substantial long-term military engagements—what I would call, borrowing a phrase from President Obama, “wars of choice”—must be brought to the House in advance of the commitment. Although many of us believe that the decision made in 2003 to invade Iraq was a mistake, I do not think that there is anyone here who believes that it was a mistake for the House to debate that decision and be given an opportunity to vote on it. So we agree on that principle as well.

James Gray: My hon. Friend is making an extremely convincing speech, but he is quite wrong on that point. I think that the great mistake in 2003 was that Tony Blair did come to the House, and did secure political cover for himself by allowing a vote. Had we not had a vote, it would have been much easier for many of us to hold him to account thereafter.

Nick Boles: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. I heard him make it earlier, and I think it is a very interesting point. I suppose my conclusion is that it is simply not realistic to think that a major modern democracy can invade another country where there is no immediate national security threat and where no immediate national interest is at risk without coming to its Parliament, explaining its strategy and receiving approval for it, although I do accept my hon. Friend's argument that that subsequently limited the power of Parliament to hold the Government to account for their decision.

Let me now briefly focus on what I think are the two points of disagreement. We disagree on the question of which military actions should not require a prior vote in Parliament, and we disagree on the question of what

form the convention should take. Should it be statute, or should it be a convention that is unwritten, as so many of our conventions are?

On the first question, I think we would all accept that if troops landed on the beaches of the Isle of Wight, as was mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister should be able to act that very night without a prior vote in Parliament. I suspect that if one of our NATO allies were attacked—let us say that Russian troops rolled into Estonia on a Saturday afternoon—many of us, although I am not sure about the Leader of the Opposition, would accept that fulfilling our duties under the NATO treaty should also not require prior parliamentary authorisation through a vote.

However, I do believe that there are difficult cases. I believe that we saw—and I saw, and I voted—one of the most difficult cases when we were last asked whether we should respond to a chemical weapons attack by President Assad on his own people in Syria. That, of course, was the vote that took place in 2013. My contention is that we made a fundamental error. We should never have held that vote. It is not just that we were wrong to vote, as we did collectively in Parliament, to reject action; the Government, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were wrong to bring that issue to Parliament and ask for a vote, for the very reasons that have been laid out so well by Members, particularly those with military experience.

This Parliament did not have the information necessary to make that decision. This Parliament could not share in the intelligence information about what President Assad was up to. As a result, Assad saw that we would not act when he used those chemical weapons, and what did he then do? As the leader of the Liberal Democrats has pointed out, he has used chemical weapons serially—not just on four or five occasions, but on many occasions since then—because he saw that the west would never do anything about it.

The reason the United States did not do anything about it, and the reason France did not do anything about it, was the vote that had taken place in this House. They were all going to act until we were given a vote, which we should not have been given, to question the Prime Minister's judgment that action should be taken. We rejected his advice, and as a result the Syrian people have suffered much, much more. We made a fundamental error that cost many hundreds of lives of Syrian families and Syrian children. This is not an arcane debate about process; this goes to the heart.

That is why I urge Members to resist the suggestion that we should put these matters into legislation. The genius of our constitution is that it is not written down. The genius is that it is based on convention, and the genius of convention is that convention can evolve in response to actual facts. It is true that it has now become a convention that Parliament has a vote on military action in many circumstances. Through the decision made by this Prime Minister last weekend, that convention is rightly evolving again to re-establish the idea that when a major humanitarian crisis takes place, she should be able to act, and come to Parliament afterwards.

2.49 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a huge privilege to follow the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and it is great to see him in such

fine form. I agree with almost everything that he said, although we can parse the toss on what happened in 2013. I certainly agree with what he said about the principle that our Government have the authority to make the decisions that were made last week. That authority rests with them. They have the authority, they have the justification, they have access to all the intelligence and the evidence, and they are duty bound to defend not only this nation, but national interests and the international standards with which this House agrees. So I agree most fundamentally that the decision rests with Government and that it is one for Government to make.

I am increasingly impressed by the principled position that I hear from the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable). I have not had so much contact with him over the many years, but I have listened carefully to his contributions in this Chamber since his return to Parliament. He cited 2013 and the principle of parliamentary approval in 2013, yet decries the fact that this Parliament did not approve of action. The consequence of our Prime Minister—charged with the defence of this nation and our interests and international standards—not seeking the comfort of parliamentary approval should be, some now argue, to put in a process and to remove that decision-making ability from her. That is fundamentally wrong. It would be wrong for this Parliament to remove that power from our Government on the basis of a decision that was the right one to take, and that was constitutionally and legally taken with the best advice available. If we all agree that it was the right thing to do, why should we believe that it is now appropriate to consider this House putting in place a legislative barrier that has the potential to stop the right decision being taken when it needs to be taken?

The title of this motion does not take us very far, and nor does the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. I have learned nothing more about what he actually wants to achieve from a war powers Act, but we should know this: it really matters not what this Parliament passes as a war powers Act, because if our action does not adhere to the seventh article of the UN charter, it is illegal and it would not matter if we had parliamentary approval or not. We either take action that adheres to the UN charter or we do not; we take action that is internationally legally justified, or we do not.

From looking at a brief history of the positions of the Leader of the Opposition, it is clear that the arguments he puts forward would have a much stronger imprimatur if he had ever believed it was appropriate to act against a monster or despot or dictator internationally. He has not done so; he refuses to do so, and a quick glance at history demonstrates that. When UN peacekeepers needed to be rescued from Sierra Leone, the Leader of the Opposition voted against; when we took action in Kosovo and Bosnia, the Leader of the Opposition was against those actions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Gavin Robinson: I will give way, as I will get an extra minute.

Mr Dhesi: The substance of today's debate is not the intention or voting record of the Leader of the Opposition; the debate is about process, and that is what the hon. Gentleman's speech should concentrate on.

Gavin Robinson: If we focus simply on process today and ignore principle, we will make a huge mistake. I am looking very much at the reasons why.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks about dictators and tyrants and events elsewhere in the world, but the UK took no action against Mugabe or Pinochet, and regime change is illegal under international law. The problem is that if we start to flout international law, how we do challenge others?

Gavin Robinson: We have not flouted international law, of course. After Kosovo, there is a clear legal justification for action for humanitarian purposes, as has been clearly outlined. We could even go back to the UN resolution of 2013: articles 1 and 21 specifically provide for military action where there has been a breach of, or failure to adhere to, the chemical weapons prohibition charter. That is there. The UN has been talked about, and everyone knows about the process and the problems we have had in getting Russian approval in the Security Council for a position for action.

The UN did back action for the first Gulf war; it mandated action for that, but the Leader of the Opposition put down motions in this House condemning the UN for giving its approval for such actions. This matters, because the motion before the House is not about a noble justification for the introduction of a legislative barrier on our Government in taking action; this matters because there are those in this place who dress up as noble their position, while all they want to do in each and every instance is frustrate the ability of this Government or the international community to take action against tyrants.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: This debate is not about the voting record of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). It is about a principle and practice going forward where 650 Members of Parliament representing the people of the United Kingdom make a decision on such matters. It is not about those who might happen to find themselves in certain positions in Government; it is about Parliament having oversight of what they are doing.

Gavin Robinson: That is the point the hon. Gentleman has made, and there are people who genuinely believe that: there are people who genuinely take a principled position and on each and every occasion will take a decision on the basis—

Leo Docherty *rose*—

Gavin Robinson: I apologise to my good and hon. Friend, but I have taken a number of interventions and have little time left and think I should conclude now.

People have the ability to take a principled decision and stand on each and every occasion that we consider military action internationally. I highlight the Leader of the Opposition's record because he introduced this motion. He suggests that the Government should be frustrated from taking decisions that are in our national interest or in defence of our nation, or that stand up for international standards and norms. He suggests there is some noble principle behind the position he puts forward; I suggest there is not. It is a cover for impotence and inertia.

2.57 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It is a privilege to follow such a thoughtful and principled speech by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson).

Most Members of this House—certainly myself and certainly the Prime Minister—are naturally cautious about deploying members of our armed forces and putting them in harm's way. There is of course a risk in intervention, which has been well-articulated in the last 24 hours in this House, and we pay the price of past interventions that have been wrong, but there is also a price in not intervening, and we need to understand the dynamics of events when Governments decide whether or not to deploy our troops.

In doing so, we need to understand the nature of conflict. We think too often that conflict is between two opposing armed forces, with one seizing and holding ground. Such conflicts are easy to understand, but we now live in a world where there is hybrid warfare and there are counter-insurgency operations, and we could be talking about an operation to rescue a downed pilot or a drone attack against individuals who present a direct ability to harm our constituents, and decisions have to be taken very quickly. So this comes down to the nature of our leaders and what goes through their minds and how they make decisions at such times.

There is a perfectly honourable tradition in this country of pacifism. There were pacifists with whom, had I been around at the time, I would probably have profoundly disagreed but who had a certain nobility when in 1914 they stood up against an enormous rush to war and said, "No, we think this is wrong," and many of them paid a huge price for doing that. The Leader of the Opposition has been a frequent visitor to Greenham common in my constituency and has spoken with pride about his mother's time spent outside the wire there. He has also spoken about visiting the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston. I can both respect and totally disagree with him, and indeed his mother, for the decisions they were taking at that time, but I can respect them. I would respect him more if he came to the House today and said, "Look, this is where I am from. I will not support this country going to war and I will therefore constrain not only this Government but future Governments from doing that." I would have so much more respect for him if he did that.

I have sat through many debates, and I have participated in many debates in which we have made the wrong decision, as well as those in which we have made the right decision. Too often, those debates come down to arguments about tactics. What this House should do in those circumstances is consider strategy. To me, the strategy in the last few days has been obvious. It is about whether we condone—and, by our inaction, shrug our shoulders and walk away from—the grotesque image of children coughing up blood and spittle because they have been gassed in a cellar by a monster. That is the image. We can talk about process, as hon. Members on both sides have done today, but that is the thought that we have to hold in our minds.

Geraint Davies: The right hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that a Syrian doctor in Swansea approached me to say that his wife's family had been involved in a gas attack in which their two-year-old died in front of them. He says that the doctors in Douma

have been told by the Syrians at the point of a gun: “Unless you give a testimony that there was not a gas attack, doctor, we will kill your children.”

Richard Benyon: I think the hon. Gentleman needs to look at a lot more of the open-source material that I have looked at. For example, the other night, the BBC was interviewing the parents of children there. He can follow some of the rather eccentric people who were in Parliament Square yesterday, or he can follow the facts. I strongly suggest that he does the latter—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. I am told that I might have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman. If I have made that mistake, I do apologise to him.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about the Survation poll. I would just ask him to consider whether the 54% of people in that poll were given details of the exact measures that the Government were having to take, and of the complications involved in controlling an operation with two other nation partners. Were they told about the difficulties of trying to put together an operation that sought to minimise the risk of collateral damage? Were they told about the need to ensure the secrecy of the targeting? The measures needed in these events are so complicated that to talk about them in terms of a public opinion poll involving a binary decision, and indeed in the context of debates in this House, is extremely difficult. What sort of debate would we have? I have sat through debates in which people have said, “I will not walk through the Division Lobby with the Government until I have had more details of the operations that are planned, and unless I hear that x, y, and z measures will be taken.” Anyone who has had anything to do with military operations will know that the plan falls apart when the first shot is fired, and that we are then in the hands of events.

When I was a member of the Executive, I found coming to this House or being quizzed in front of a Select Committee quite tiresome at times. I immersed myself in the details of the issues, and being held to account was sometimes not much fun. Now, as a Back Bencher, I find holding the Government to account enormous fun. I find it very invigorating, but that does not preclude us from trying to do what is right. The problem is that there are some elements in this House for whom this has become a vanity operation. This is more serious than that, however, and I hope that we will therefore tread very carefully when it comes to doing this. We have the complication of an article 5 commitment, whereby if a NATO nation is invaded, we are treaty-bound to respond. I therefore urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to think carefully before going down the path presented today by the Leader of the Opposition.

3.4 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I am very pleased to speak in this debate, and I hope that I would be making this contribution regardless of which party was in power. At a reception in your apartments, Mr Speaker, you were asked who were the best ever orators in Parliament. You said that there had been many, but two that you often quoted were the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)—who, sadly, is not in his place today—and the now deceased right hon. Robin Cook. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) referred to Robin Cook’s speech this afternoon, and I think it

goes to the heart of why we are here today. The role of Parliament is important because there is an element of having to persuade not only one another but the country of our views, our principles and our ideas.

That is an important principle that came out of the very lengthy Chilcot inquiry. I was on the shadow Front Bench during that time, and I had to pinch myself to stop from crying at times because of the pain that was in that report. Today, we have to reflect on what we have learned from the report, not just about the importance of Parliament and our role in scrutinising the Executive, but about two other key elements. One of those involves the need for a plan. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) made a fantastic speech yesterday in which she mentioned the cross-party group on Syria and its steadfast commitment to the Syrian people. She spoke about the importance of having a plan, and one of the sticking points over the past week has been the lack of a sense of what we should do next. There has been a sense of “this feels fine for this weekend, but what happens next?”

The second element is the need for high-quality intelligence and evidence. This goes back to what was crudely referred to as the “dodgy dossier”, which has haunted us in our political debates from many years. We still need to ask those questions. Many of us will make no apology for asking questions. That is our job as Back-Bench Members, whatever role we might have.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that when someone asks a probing question on these kinds of issues, it is neither fair nor right to accuse that person of being an apologist or a traitor?

Catherine West: I often feel that the language used can prevent us from getting to the goal that we want to achieve. That is certainly the case in relation to questions about peace and war.

It has been mentioned that Lord William Hague committed himself and others to enshrining this kind of an idea in law, in exact legal language, but I understand that he has now changed his mind. Due to other commitments, I did not have time to listen to his contribution this morning, but I will go back and listen to it because I am interested to know why he felt this matter to be pressing when he was in this place and why, now that he is no longer in this place, it is no longer so pressing. We carry a certain mantle on our shoulders as parliamentarians in this House, but I do not think that that sense of responsibility applies in the other place to the same degree. There is not that same sense of the ballot box and the sense of our being pushed here. We have to live up to that responsibility.

In conclusion, there was plenty of time last week to recall Parliament, and I wish that we had had yesterday’s debate—perhaps not with every single security detail—at that point. Many of us could have taken losing a vote—or, indeed, winning a vote. Whatever might have happened with that vote, at least we would have done what we always do, which is to debate, to contend, to get cross, to get sad, or to get happy. We would have done what we do in this place and gone through the Lobby to produce a result for the people we represent.

3.9 pm

Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Lady. One of the issues here is that when we debate military intervention, we quite often get things quite wrong on the basis of limited information, the rest of which we are not privy to. In 2013, this House was recalled to debate, discuss and vote on a motion to approve military intervention against Syria on the basis of Assad's use of chemical weapons in the past. At that time, the chemical used was sarin, and 1,700 people died, and who knows how many of them were children. It was an ever-worsening situation that came after two years of inaction from the UN, and it was backed by evidence from the UN's weapons inspectors. As we know, that vote was lost. I did not back the action, and I carry a sense of guilt following how I voted.

At the time, many Members on both sides of the House argued that if we did not vote to take action, that would be perceived as a weakness. They argued that no action, in addition to the UN's intransigence, would mean that Assad would strike again and would use chemical weapons against Syrian civilians and children again in the future. Those Members were absolutely right. We are debating here today after the same thing has happened again.

After the 2013 vote, the first country to say that it welcomed our voting not to bomb Syria was Russia, strangely enough. What happened last week was a necessary one-off strike to attack and disable some of the chemical depositories and bases owned by Assad and to leave him in no doubt that the international community will never accept his breaking of a century-old accord—his crossing of the red line—and his use of chemical weapons on his own civilians. The Prime Minister, along with France, America and our allies, will not accept that, and they have stood by the side of the civilians and children of Syria.

Until recently, my constituency was home to RAF Henlow and is still home to the RAF Chicksands intelligence base. My constituents include many former and existing military service personnel. Launching a one-off, pre-emptive strike with no discussion or vote was the Prime Minister putting the safety of those personnel at the heart of her decision. Let none of us here be so arrogant as to think that we know best, that we know more or that we should always have the final say, because it has already been proven that we do not always get it right, and some would argue that we got it wrong when we voted to go to war in Iraq in 2003. If the Prime Minister was proposing regime change or to go to war or to enter into a sustained campaign, we would of course have a debate, and we would expect the Prime Minister to bring that case to Parliament, perhaps even for a vote. However, she was not.

Before we vote today, I ask every Member to imagine what I am about to say, because this is not about a process and there is no substance to the motion that we will be voting on.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Ms Dorries: I will not give way.

Imagine that the children of Syria, with their eyes streaming and their bloodstained spittle, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon)

just described, are stood here in the Chamber with us. Imagine that they are sat among us, listening to us. How would they want us to vote? This is not about process or whether information is brought to the House of Commons.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Dorries: No, I will not.

Returning to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), how can we cast a vote when we do not have all the information? How can we make such an ill-informed decision, as we have done in the past? Would the children of Syria want us to do that? I know what will happen when I next cast a substantive vote on an issue such as this: I will imagine the hand of one of those Syrian children slipping into mine and guiding me into the right Lobby.

3.14 pm

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to be able to make a short contribution today. In 1996, on the back of outrages in east Africa and the fact that Sudan had not long gotten rid of Osama bin Laden from its territory, the US launched a cruise missile attack on Al-Shifa on the basis that it was the site of a plant for the creation of VX. It later transpired that the Al-Shifa plant was producing pharmaceuticals and that there was no evidence whatsoever that chemicals were being used in any improper way. The Sudanese still refer to the incident, keeping the site as rubble, and, on the occasions that I have been there, have offered to show people, including the Americans, what the plant was. I use that as an example of where things have been found to be wrong. Intelligence is not sacrosanct. I have never been a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee and am never likely to be, but it is right for this Parliament to hold the Government to account, and there is nothing more important than Parliament holding the Government to account on whether it is right to go to war.

The Al-Shifa example is about the Americans and their lack of intelligence in this respect. The strike became known as a wag-the-dog incident, because it was more to do with President Clinton trying to offset some of his own problems at home. I cannot say what the motive behind the thinking of the current President of the United States is, but there are sometimes ulterior motives for why people launch attacks. In our case, we have Afghanistan, when we were told that not a shot would be fired and that it would be a straightforward invasion, and Libya, which we were told was about regime change and evolving a democratic structure.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Drew: I am not giving way, because we are short on time.

In our case, however, this is more about Iraq. I was in the House at the time of the Iraq war, and I remember that the Government did not willingly give Back Benchers a vote. We dragged it out of the Government, and there was so much opposition that they had to give us a vote. In a sense, Back Benchers created that precedent, which is an important convention.

It is important that Parliament has a view, and one of the problems is that our constituents have been emailing us and stopping us in the street to ask, "What is your view? Why haven't we heard what Parliament has to say?" The right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) made that point, and I totally agree with him. It is important that Parliament has a say. Parliament can get things right and get things wrong, but so can Governments, and it is right that we exercise our democratic right as elected representatives.

A war powers Act—remember that this is just an SO24 debate—would undergo proper scrutiny, as the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) made quite clear, and go through all the process. He suggested that there could be other ways of doing this, but I strongly believe that this debate should be had, because things are unclear at the moment. The Government have changed the convention. They should have come here for a debate—not a question session, but a debate and a vote. They chose not to, however, so the situation is unclear. A precedent was created on Iraq, but it has now been changed, so I merely say that it is right and proper to have this debate today and that we therefore begin to move towards clarity on what was previously a convention of the House. It no longer exists, and it is about time that Parliament had its view and was able to decide on whether the convention is right or wrong.

3.18 pm

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Thank you for granting this debate today, Mr Speaker. I think everybody knows my position, but I want to lay it out clearly. I profoundly disagree with many Members when it comes to a potential war powers Act, which would be an act of calamitous insanity for our foreign policy. I am going to make it very clear why I think that and why the Prime Minister has done absolutely the right thing, and I ask Members to hear my remarks in context.

I have done the other side of the veil. I have operated at the highest possible strategic level for this country on operations, and I must be honest: if we are to continue to have the freedom to manoeuvre and the opportunity to keep this country safe, we cannot enshrine these powers of the Prime Minister in a war powers Act.

First, there are the practical reasons. It is absolutely right that some aspects of intelligence in this country will never be made public. Why? Because the way we gather them is a secret, and our opponents do not know how we gather them. If we bring them out into the public domain, we expose that capability and we make this country less safe, simply so we can have a say in this House on foreign policy. That is not right.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Johnny Mercer: I will not give way. I have heard a lot of the arguments in this House.

The speed and secrecy that we try to uphold in military operations cannot be curtailed by decision making. Should Parliament have a say? Should Parliament have a debate? Should MPs be listened to? Are MPs important in this debate? Absolutely, but when it comes to the defence of this nation and the defence of the freedoms and privileges that we in this House live up to

and enjoy every day, we cannot retrospectively inhibit the people who fight for them by introducing a war powers Act.

This country has a role to play on the global stage. Think for a moment of the Americans and the French and of how we would look when they ask us in the dead of night, in that last decision-making process, whether or not we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them in some of these highly contentious operations. Do we want our Prime Minister to have in the back of her mind, "I've got to go to Parliament and I may lose a vote, so therefore I am not going to do the right thing for the country"? Or do we want to empower her to do the right thing in the British national interest to keep this country safe?

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): We all accept that the sources of intelligence should never be disclosed to the House of Commons, but surely these are essentially political and foreign policy judgments about whether to use force to defend the national interest. These arguments could be applied to health, education and lots of other areas. The concept that the gentlemen in Whitehall know best has never been allowed to overrule Parliament in any other area of policy, certainly not in modern times.

Johnny Mercer: I respect the position of the Father of the House, but there is a fundamental difference between intelligence on national security and policy on health, social security benefits or whatever it is.

Jeremy Quin: Picking up on the intervention of the Father of the House, how could this House have possibly taken a decision on the proposed action unless we broadly knew the nature of the action, how limited it would be and what would be targeted? That is exactly the information that would have been of use to the Syrian regime.

Johnny Mercer: My hon. Friend makes a very clear point. Some of the contributions in this House lend weight to why Parliament should not have a say in this. Time and again, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence have stood up in this country and said, "This is a limited action. This is a one-time action. We are targeting chemical weapons." Yet there is question after question: "Is this part of a greater war? What are you going to do about Russia?" The Prime Minister must have answered those questions 47 times, and they keep coming.

I am afraid that one of the most galling points in all this is how anybody in this House can take it upon themselves to accuse this Prime Minister, either personally or professionally, of being willing to commit UK service personnel to a conflict at the whim of anybody else when it is not in line with British interests. That is offensive and childish. It is the place of student politics, and it is not acceptable.

I respect all Members of this House, and I profoundly respect those who disagree with me. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) mentioned vanity, and everyone got upset about that. This is not a game. This is not a TV show in which we get to make profound speeches and try to make tactical decisions about military operations of which we know

[Johnny Mercer]

nothing. This is not a game. Inaction while Syria burns is not acceptable, and it has been accepted for too long in this country.

I gently say to my Prime Minister—I have sympathy with Opposition Members—that we have to bring the British people with us. It is a fundamental duty of every Member of this House to go out there and advocate for this nation if we are to take it to war. We have to do that in a way that people will support. People have to understand why they are being committed to war, and we can always do better on that, particularly after Iraq.

I went to Afghanistan and fought what were very lonely conflicts, and every single day I tried to motivate young people to do very dangerous things that nobody in this country really knew about, and sometimes did not care about. Every Member on my Front Bench and in this House has a duty to advocate in that regard.

Finally, on Iraq, I was not here in 2003 but if for the next 20 or 30 years we are persistently to consider the foreign policy objectives of this nation of ours through the prism of Iraq and of the profound mistakes that were made in that process, we will not become the Britain that we all know we want to be. It will inhibit our ability to project our interests into what we want to do. Profound mistakes were made in the decision-making process in Iraq, and we have raked over it for generations. The great British people do not want us to do that at such interminable length that we never actually play a role in the world and become the global Britain that we all know we want to be.

My plea is that on this we listen even more intently to the professionals. If anyone can find a security service professional in this country who thinks the war powers Act is a good idea, I will vote for it tonight, but they will not find a single individual with working knowledge of how security works in this country who will support this Act, and that is why I will not support it, either.

3.26 pm

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): This debate today, about how we take decisions on UK military action, is an important one. The Prime Minister's decision to commit British service personnel to involvement in limited airstrikes against Syrian targets last week has generated strong feelings on both sides.

I have mixed views on the rights and wrongs of that action, and I do not know how I would have voted had the decision been presented to Parliament, but this debate is not about that. It is about the process by which decisions of this nature are taken and the right of the Government, the Executive, to retain flexibility to act without recourse to Parliament. I think the Executive should have that right, and had I been in the Prime Minister's shoes last week, it is likely that I would have chosen a similar course.

There is an erratic President in the White House upon whom we wish to exercise influence, a UN Security Council rendered powerless by the Russian veto, a hung Parliament and the reuse of chemical weapons in a country that was supposed to have eradicated its stockpile five years ago. I do not have access to the intelligence that the Prime Minister does, but I recognise that the context in which she was acting could not have been more complex.

This debate, though, is not about the specifics of the past week; it is about the nature of the decision-making processes in future and whether we should constrain the hand of government.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making some strong points. I believe the Prime Minister should have come here last week and we should have had that debate on whatever the rights and wrongs of this were. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that not only would a very fixed war powers Act be difficult to achieve in debate, because of the wide range of views, as we have seen in this debate, but that in the one example where such an Act does exist, the United States, it has never, as far as I know, been used to prosecute a President and many actions have been taken beyond the 60-day limit? Even in practice these things do not operate in the way it is claimed.

Heidi Alexander: I have great sympathy with what my hon. Friend has said.

Much has been said in recent years about the Syria votes that happened in this place in 2013. Something that is often forgotten is that the two votes that took place on that night five years ago were about two different decision-making processes. One, the Labour motion, was a more rigorous process; the Government motion was less defined. Had either of those motions passed, there would have been another vote—a substantive vote on the question of military involvement—the following week. That vote never happened because the then Prime Minister decided he could not risk it.

I remember the build-up to that vote—I felt sick. I knew I was elected to this place to be part of these decisions, but the responsibility, even as a junior member of the Opposition Whips Office, weighed heavy upon me. The truth is that I spent 48 hours on Google, trying to locate reliable sources in order to educate myself, when I felt I should have been studying it for two years and not two days. What factions were fighting whom and where? What was the objective? What did the responsibility to protect in international humanitarian law mean, and how could one judge the legitimacy of any action? I envied the moral certitude with which some colleagues spoke. It felt enormous and it was.

I do not regret the decisions I took that night; had the outcome of the vote been different it is likely that many thousands of people would still have died as they have done in Syria since—different weapons, different culpability. Nor do I regret the decision to vote for airstrikes against ISIS targets in December 2015. In fact, I am proud of that—different proposals, different decisions. I believe that different circumstances will sometimes require different decision-making processes.

If we are to change the way in which we make decisions about military action in this country, let us do it with cool heads. Let us not start the debate when it will only be seen through the prism of last week's action. Our attention this week should be on the children of Douma, not the consciences of Westminster MPs. We owe it to those children to come up with real solutions for their country, which has been torn to shreds. Internal retrospection on our part, however well-meaning, will not help them.

3.31 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I believe that the Government's argument about the legality of last week's action is technically correct: the use of military force is part of the royal prerogative; her Majesty invests the Government with that power; the Queen is commander in chief; and this is an important power, which is vital to the effectiveness of our armed forces. So I have no constitutional disagreement with what the Government have done. However, there is a word of warning here. As Chesterton put it:

"To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it."

There is a risk here and a moral to be learned. I do commend the Prime Minister for the limited scope of the intervention. Although it is true that the Government can intervene technically and militarily without consulting Parliament, I believe that the power should be used on as few occasions as possible, if at all. That is where I echo what the Father of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), has said.

I do not accept that we need a war powers Act, because it would be justiciable. I do not believe in referring everything to the UN, where, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) has said, one power has a permanent right of veto. But I think we should proclaim this afternoon the right of Parliament to debate and vote on military action in the future, unless, as was probably the case here, there is an urgent humanitarian case to be made.

I want to say a word about some of the problems we face in the middle east, one of which is that we are seen to be *parti pris* in this conflict. We are seen by many people not to be primarily engaged in humanitarian concern for the people of Douma, but to be engaged in a proxy war. I know that that is not a fair point of view but, unfortunately, we have in the past proclaimed our desire to replace the Assad regime. The conflict began in 2011; Assad is still President of the Syrian Arab Republic. The idea that the Americans achieved a great deal by backing the Free Syrian Army—a kind of Lib Dems with guns—has proven to be a complete and total fantasy.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank you for allowing me to intervene, Mr Speaker; I was late for this debate, for which I apologise.

I cannot resist rising to that challenge. We heard the line of questioning from constituents about whether Parliament was going to be recalled—"Are you going to have a vote on it?" My answer that I did not know led to puzzlement and confusion. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that in itself is corrosive to the electorate's democratic confidence in their elected Members and what we do in this place?

Sir Edward Leigh: I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's argument. I have just said that I agree with the Father of the House that in general Parliament should have its say before action is taken.

I believe that there is so much opposition to what we are doing in the middle east because from the beginning western Governments have not really been cognisant of the sheer complexity of the situation. The Americans

are against Assad and the Russians, and for the Kurds, many of whom are against Assad, but the Americans are also allied to the Turks, who are against the American-backed Kurds, and the Turks will do anything to stop the Kurds, even though both are friends of the Americans. That shows the sheer complexity of the situation.

I must quote the patriarchs of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Melkite Catholic Church. They are based in Syria and rely on the Assad regime for protection and their continual survival. This can perhaps be dismissed, as they are subject to pressure from the regime, but their beatitudes say:

"It causes us great pain that this assault comes from powerful countries to which Syria did not cause any harm in any way."

They are Christian leaders speaking in Syria. We should be very careful.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Did any of those Christian leaders in Syria comment on the atrocities visited on innocent children that we have seen in the past week?

Sir Edward Leigh: I have just said that these Christian leaders are under great pressure from the Assad regime to toe the party line, as it were, but the fact is that their responsibility is to protect their own communities, which are under unprecedented pressure. We have to take some account of the pressure on Christian communities.

Last week, when the Vatican all-party group was in Rome, we had a meeting on persecuted Christians in Syria. We met every single expert from the refugee services and from all around the world who look into this issue, and they all told us that bombing was a dangerous thing to do with regard to opinion in the middle east and pressure from Muslims on the remaining Christian communities. I was struck when the representative of the Catholic Church in Pakistan said that the Catholic communities there would get it in the neck even more because, unfairly, so many Muslims do not differentiate between Russian bombs, American bombs, French bombs and British bombs. They say that the misery in Syria has been caused by foreign Christian powers raining bombs on their communities. That might be an unfair point of view, but it is generally held in the middle east.

This point has not been made by anybody else in the debate so far: I accept that the Government were right to act, and that they have powers under the royal prerogative to act, but I do not believe that we should pursue any more our objective of trying to change the Assad regime. If we then do act for humanitarian reasons—if we intervene to deter a possible chemical attack—we will have much more credibility in the middle east, because we would not be seen to be taking sides. That is the way forward.

Mr Grieve: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: Unfortunately I cannot give way because I am running out of time.

I have agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend, but I hope that when we debate these matters in future, we will remember this and avoid all hypocrisy. The fact is that as much as we detest Assad and as much as he is a dictator, none of us, as Christians, would want to live in an area of Syria that was outside Assad's control,

[Sir Edward Leigh]

because he would protect us. That is a difficult thing to say in Parliament and not everybody will agree with it, but I have to say what I have to say.

3.39 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): In 2011, this House was promised that the Government would

“enshrine in law for the future the necessity of consulting Parliament on military action.”

That would have completed a painful journey that started before the Iraq campaign. It took the threat of a wildcat Parliament in Church House to drag the Government to this place to set up a vote on that matter. It would have seen Parliament play a formal role, under statute, in the process of war and of action overseas. There were discussions over five years about how this might happen, before another Secretary of State came along and abandoned these plans because he believed that they would constrain operational flexibility.

Although those plans were abandoned, we have seen this week that the discussion is far from over. If we all look at our mailbags from the past few days, we will see that our constituents expect us to play a role in this process. They expect to hold us to account for our actions, and I want that.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con) *rose—*

Alex Norris: I will not give way for the minute because I wish to make some progress.

Of course, that would be exceptionally difficult, but we were sent here to tackle the exceptionally difficult. In 2013, Parliament debated military action—that has been played out many times over the past few hours—and MPs were given the opportunity to have their say, for better or for worse, to cast their votes, to speak up on behalf of their constituents and to be held accountable. It seemed at that point that a good convention had been established and that it reflected the way that things would be done.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On my hon. Friend's point about a convention, a law in the United States, the War Powers Resolution, requires the President to notify Congress of his intent and to justify within 48 hours the sending of military forces equipped for combat into foreign nations. Is that not exactly the situation that we were faced with last week?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend and I share a real passion for all matters American—not just basketball and American football, but the American constitution. He highlights my very point very well.

Sir William Cash: In view of the fact that the hon. Gentleman is invoking statute as a means of achieving his objectives, would he be good enough to explain that, effectively, this would mean surrendering national decisions of the utmost importance to the United Kingdom to the courts to decide, because that is where this would lead?

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman has not given me the chance to make my case. I am arguing for a formalised, codified role for this place so that we are not in the situation of last week when, for as many tweets as there

were about whether we should be acting at all, there were tweets questioning whether Parliament should be recalled. We should not be in this fudge at a time when we are making such important decisions.

We are not asking to constrain operational flexibility—of course we are not. I do not believe that I and all other Members collectively should be setting a strategy for a campaign, but we should have the opportunity to make sure that there is a strategy for the campaign and to ask questions.

Sir Hugo Swire: This was not about a campaign. In this instance, it was effectively, about a surgical strike. Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that he would constrain the flexibility of the Prime Minister if there was a question of timing? If she were obliged to come to this House first, that could seriously impede any operational activity.

Alex Norris: I am not arguing for that. We could weave into the statute circumstances in which there was a clear and immediate need to act in the national interest, and the right hon. Gentleman will be glad to hear that I am getting to that very point.

I want to draw on the work of the former Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. I know that you have a keen eye for detail and strong powers of recall, Mr Speaker, so you will remember that it was my predecessor, Graham Allen, who chaired that Committee. I am afraid that a keen interest in constitutional reform and all those sorts of matters does not pass down through the generations of Nottingham North parliamentarians—or if it does, it has skipped me. Nevertheless, I say to hon. Members that the Committee's excellent documents are a manual for how we might have such a statute in our law. They offer comprehensive insight. They list the hurdles that we would face, including those regarding the courts, and outline the solutions that are there at our disposal. The solutions are there, so this can be done if there is a will to do it.

The previous Prime Minister said that consulting Parliament regarding military action was a “good convention”. Clearly that convention leaves too much room for debate, as I think this week has shown. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it is broken. Now is the time to settle this one way or another. We should put Parliament's role in statute. Even if the position is for Parliament to play no role at all, that ought to be written down, and that is why we need a war powers Act. What happened last week was a fudge. It will not do that we are doing a hokey cokey over whether we are coming to London to discuss these matters when we are dealing with really significant incidents across the globe.

The Prime Minister says that the convention still stands, so she believes that Parliament ought to have a role in military action. Well, now is the time to make good on that. Through legislation, we can show once and for all what Parliament does and does not do, and how—in the popular words of the day—we have taken back control for this Parliament.

3.45 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): In making my contribution towards the end of this debate, I want to reflect particularly on the speeches that were made from the Government

Benches at the beginning. My hon. Friends the Members for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) and for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) brought us back to the fundamentals of parliamentary accountability. Parliament controls the laws, supply and confidence over the Executive. Through those mechanisms, as my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset made clear, we have the ability to hold the Government firmly to account.

The history of the Armed Forces Act 2006 and, underneath that, the evolution of convention regarding Governments coming to Parliament and our flexible constitution have brought us to the place where we now have the expected accountability of Governments coming to Parliament in order to seek authorisation for specific military actions. But this is merely convention. If we examine the occasions on which the Government have come to this House to seek parliamentary authority in order to reinforce their prerogative powers, we find that they have happened because of the political situation and the Government's assessment of what they need to reinforce their authority. In 2003, the then Labour Government and Tony Blair had a minority of support from their Back Benchers for the proposed action in Iraq. That made it necessary for the then Government to seek parliamentary authority to reinforce their political position.

Regarding the authorisation that Parliament gave to the Government of the day, I sat on the Opposition Benches during that debate, listening to the then Prime Minister make his argument, thinking that it was a bizarre state of affairs. My former colleagues in the armed forces were on the start line, in the final stages of their battle procedure before they conducted the invasion of Iraq, in which the British armed forces were responsible for about a third of the frontline with our American allies. It struck me as extraordinary that we were having a two-day debate in Parliament that was ending at about 10 o'clock or midnight, about six hours before that operation was due to commence, and that Parliament was going to say yes or no to that operation. On those grounds alone, I thought that it would be irresponsible to my former colleagues for us to suddenly say, "No, you've got to stop guys. We have decided that it's the wrong thing to do."

As we now know from history, it probably would have been better had we said no. But we should have been saying no infinitely earlier than the immediate military commencement of a major strategic operation like that. We know that Tony Blair gave his commitment to President Bush in April 2002. We know that our military were being instructed to make plans for the invasion of Iraq and to be part of that operation from the summer of 2002. This is where Parliament and the conventions that we have appeared to have established collide with military and operational reality.

I am in total agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) about the circumstances under which one seeks parliamentary approval for operations of the kind that we saw last week. He and I jointly authored a pamphlet, which every colleague in the House received in July last year, on how Britain should respond to chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Our answer to the parliamentary problem that the Government faced was some kind of pre-authorisation motion, so we would have had a debate

about the circumstances that the Government faced last week and they would have then been able to act within authority that had been given by Parliament for the kind of action involved. Indeed, that parliamentary approval itself might have acted as a form of deterrent, with the Syrian Government then knowing that they would face action involving the British armed forces in response to the kind of situation that the Americans had already reacted to before.

All this involves the development of a convention about the Government coming to this House. I do not think that a war powers Act is the appropriate answer. As my hon. Friends have made clear, this House does have the essential elements of control over the Executive—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I will call the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on condition that he sits down at 3.53 pm—the start thereof, no later. Is that agreed? It is agreed.

3.50 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I would never disagree with you, Mr Speaker, for all you say.

This whole thing will look weird to the public after we have had a weekend of Members of Parliament following events on their TV screens and debating in TV studios while this Chamber sits completely vacant. No one can deny that this has been an issue of national importance, and yet there has been barely a finger of protest lifted by Government Back Benchers. Worse, we have had the grotesque sight of Members of Parliament willing to sign away their agency to an Executive who wish to grab more power. In fact, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) said that it was not for Members of Parliament to inhibit the Prime Minister. That is exactly the job of Members of Parliament, and it has been since around 1688. Yesterday another Conservative Member of Parliament actually thanked the Prime Minister for not bothering to ask him to make a decision on this matter—that was extraordinary.

Is this place really filled with people who think such foolish things? What kind of supine Member of Parliament would think such a thing in the face of this Executive? With the UN Security Council becoming a more broken instrument each and every day, this is a time for more democratic accountability, not less. As for those saying that we could not have voted without the full picture, let us go back to 2015 when they were falling over each other to heap praise on the then Prime Minister for his decisive actions in calling a vote. I do not recall them then saying that we did not have the full picture and could not possibly take part in a debate. This has been a smokescreen used by Conservative Members of Parliament longing to sign over the agency that the public invests in them to hold this Government accountable and to ensure that they do not keep rolling back the powers of this Parliament—and those Members ought to be ashamed of it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. The debate will be concluded by the Member who secured it. I call the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn.

3.53 pm

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In the two minutes I have available to me, I just want to say that this is a debate about the rights of Parliament and the role of Parliament.

Many Members have made very good contributions to the debate. I was very impressed by the speech by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who took us back to 1688. He is right about the Bill of Rights, but I just gently say to him that I think democracy can go forward even from 1688 to a slightly more modern time. He is right that we have an unwritten constitution, which is why I believe that we do indeed need an Act that would require Governments to seek the approval of Parliament before undertaking major military actions or campaigns.

I was fascinated by the speech by the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon). I am not quite sure why he brought my mother into the debate, but I am sure she would be very proud to have been mentioned in it. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for his support for two principles: first, that Parliament could and should have been recalled last week and was not, and secondly, that Parliament should have the right to decide on major policy issues and be able to hold the Government to account.

The 2011 doctrine laid down what the process should be, and the Government are trying to row back from that doctrine. This is a time for Parliament and democracy to assert itself on the most serious issues we ever face as Members of Parliament: whether to send people into war or not, and what the Government's strategy is. I invite my colleagues to vote against the substantive motion, to express our dissatisfaction with the Government's response and assert the rights of Parliament.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question put accordingly.

The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 256.

Division No. 137]

[3.55 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Blunt, Crispin
Afolami, Bim	Boles, Nick
Afriyie, Adam	Bone, Mr Peter
Aldous, Peter	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Allan, Lucy	Bowie, Andrew
Allen, Heidi	Bradley, Ben
Amess, Sir David	Bradley, rh Karen
Andrew, Stuart	Brady, Sir Graham
Argar, Edward	Braverman, Suella
Atkins, Victoria	Brereton, Jack
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bridgen, Andrew
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi	Brine, Steve
Baker, Mr Steve	Brokenshire, rh James
Baldwin, Harriett	Bruce, Fiona
Barclay, Stephen	Buckland, Robert
Baron, Mr John	Burghart, Alex
Bebb, Guto	Burns, Conor
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Burt, rh Alistair
Benyon, rh Richard	Cairns, rh Alun
Beresford, Sir Paul	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Berry, Jake	Cartlidge, James
Blackman, Bob	Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria	Green, Chris
Chalk, Alex	Green, rh Damian
Chishti, Rehman	Greening, rh Justine
Chope, Sir Christopher	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Churchill, Jo	Griffiths, Andrew
Clark, Colin	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Clark, rh Greg	Hair, Kirstene
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Halfon, rh Robert
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hall, Luke
Cleverly, James	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hammond, Stephen
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Hancock, rh Matt
Collins, Damian	Hands, rh Greg
Costa, Alberto	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Courts, Robert	Harrington, Richard
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Harris, Rebecca
Crabb, rh Stephen	Harrison, Trudy
Crouch, Tracey	Hart, Simon
Davies, Chris	Hayes, rh Mr John
Davies, David T. C.	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davies, Glyn	Heapey, James
Davies, Philip	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Davis, rh Mr David	Heaton-Jones, Peter
Dinenage, Caroline	Henderson, Gordon
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Herbert, rh Nick
Docherty, Leo	Hinds, rh Damian
Dodds, rh Nigel	Hoare, Simon
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Hollingbery, George
Donelan, Michelle	Hollinrake, Kevin
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Double, Steve	Holloway, Adam
Dowden, Oliver	Howell, John
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Huddleston, Nigel
Drax, Richard	Hughes, Eddie
Duddridge, James	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Duguid, David	Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Jack, Mr Alister
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	James, Margot
Dunne, Mr Philip	Javid, rh Sajid
Ellis, Michael	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Eustice, George	Jenkyins, Andrea
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jenrick, Robert
Evennett, rh David	Johnson, rh Boris
Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Johnson, Gareth
Field, rh Mark	Johnson, Joseph
Ford, Vicky	Jones, Andrew
Foster, Kevin	Jones, rh Mr David
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Jones, Mr Marcus
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kawczynski, Daniel
Frazer, Lucy	Keegan, Gillian
Freeman, George	Kennedy, Seema
Freer, Mike	Kerr, Stephen
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Gale, Sir Roger	Knight, Julian
Garnier, Mark	Kwarteng, Kwasi
Gauke, rh Mr David	Lamont, John
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Lancaster, rh Mark
Gibb, rh Nick	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Leadsom, rh Andrea
Girvan, Paul	Lee, Dr Phillip
Glen, John	Leigh, Sir Edward
Goldsmith, Zac	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Lewer, Andrew
Gove, rh Michael	Lewis, rh Brandon
Graham, Luke	Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Graham, Richard	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Grant, Bill	Lidington, rh Mr David
Grant, Mrs Helen	Little Pengelly, Emma
Gray, James	Lopez, Julia
Grayling, rh Chris	Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Kelly Tolhurst and
Mims Davies

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie

Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly

MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McGinn, Conor
McInnes, Liz
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
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
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wishart, Pete
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Parliament's rights in relation to the approval of military action by British Forces overseas.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman really feels that it is timely and that the nation needs to hear him—I am not sure it really does—then blurt it out briefly, man!

Nick Boles: Forgive me, Mr Speaker, but I was here when you ruled on the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) on the question of the Leader of the Opposition laying a motion and then urging people to vote against it. This is not the first time that has happened. I would appreciate some guidance on when that is permissible and when it is not.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. First of all, it is not the first time it has happened. Secondly, it is entirely orderly. Thirdly, there is a widespread misunderstanding of the constitutional position. The position is this: votes should follow voice. The Speaker collects the voices before deciding whether a Division is required. A Member must not vote in opposition to the way in which he or she shouted. That is not the same as a Member being obliged to vote in a particular way on the basis of having moved or spoken to a motion. There are historical precedents that demonstrate that Members often move motions to facilitate debate and, for a variety of reasons, there is no breach of order. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman. I say that on the basis, to some degree, of my own knowledge, buttressed and reinforced by having consulted the scholarly craniums of our expert Clerks. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and to the House. *[Interruption.]* It may be long, but it has the advantage of being true. *[Interruption.]* Odd? I apologise to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). Well, I am odd! We are all odd. It may be slightly odd, but it has the advantage of being factually correct as a description of our arrangements. We will leave it there. No further gesticulations in the direction of people thought to be odd will be required at this stage of our proceedings, but I am grateful to the right hon. Lady and to the hon. Gentleman, who flagged up an important point.

Anti-Semitism

Mr Speaker: Before I ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to begin the debate, I just want to say two things if I may. First, Front Bench speeches cannot be constrained, but dozens of people wish to speak in this debate. I have exhorted the Department and the shadow team as follows: their Front-Bench speeches should not exceed 20 minutes in total. It is far too long to make a 20-minute speech and take bucketloads of interventions. There are 36 and more colleagues who wish to speak, so I would appreciate it if that were respected.

Secondly, if Members cannot be here for the wind-ups, I hope they will understand that they should not try to speak in the debate, because that is not fair to colleagues. I look to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to open the debate.

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): I beg to move,

That this House has considered anti-semitism.

This debate is about a prejudice with a long past, an all-too-lively present and a future that is for us to determine. This is the first general debate on anti-Semitism that we have had in this House. This is an issue that should concern not just the Jewish community, but all communities on both sides of the House. I think I speak for all of us in not wanting this to be an issue that we have to grapple with in the next decade, in the next Government and indeed, at the next general election. This is an issue that has come to a head now, and we must deal with it now.

I believe that the task before us today is more important than just discussing policy solutions. What we need to achieve today is to show the Jewish community in our country, and indeed those who may be watching abroad, that we do get it, that both sides of this House stand united in recognising the pernicious prejudice of anti-Semitism and in recognising the anxiety that is felt within the community here in Britain in 2018, and that we are listening to their concerns carefully, with humility and determination.

It is in that spirit that I thank the Leader of the Opposition for attending this debate. It will perhaps not be the most comfortable three hours of debate that he has sat in on, but he makes the most of—[*Interruption*]. And his effort is appreciated for attending. There has frankly been a deeply worrying lack of leadership and moral clarity on this issue from him. Being here to listen to what is being said by his concerned colleagues and others is an important step in showing the community that this issue is being taken seriously, and I sincerely hope that he takes the opportunity to once and for all clarify his position on anti-Semitism.

To combat anti-Semitism we must first understand the true nature of the problem. In December 2016, the UK became the first country to formally adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism, and I pay tribute to my good friend and the UK's post-holocaust envoy, Sir Eric Pickles, for that. This definition was also adopted by the Labour party, and it includes the following:

“Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective—such

as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.”

These tropes have been around for a very, very long time—the world's oldest hatred.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will in a moment. In line with what Mr Speaker said earlier, I will take a few interventions, but I want to make sure that as many Members as possible get the opportunity to contribute today. However, I will come back to the hon. Lady.

A century ago, the then US President, William Howard Taft, described anti-Semitism as a “noxious weed”. Unfortunately, in recent years, this weed has found fertile soil in the corners of social media and political activism in our country, especially those cloaked in anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiment. Criticisms of actions taken by the Israeli Government are one thing, but for many, it is simply a mask for anti-Jewish, racist sentiment. In general, Britain can be proud of its peaceful and tolerant environment for Jews, but that is in danger of changing. Across Europe and the United States, anti-Semitism is on the rise.

Last year, the Community Security Trust recorded 1,346 anti-Semitic incidents in the UK—the highest on record.¹ These incidents include, for example, graffiti at a synagogue in Leeds, social media abuse of Jewish figures—not least, Members of Parliament—and Jewish schoolchildren being physically and verbally attacked on a school bus. In some ways, this type of explicit anti-Semitism is easier to recognise and to tackle head on—the hate preachers, the extremist mosques, and far-right and far-left groups—but much more of it is oblique. A search on Google produces more than half a million hits for “holocaust hoax”. Thousands more pages tell people that a greedy Otto Frank forged his daughter's diary in a cunning scheme to try to make some money. Then there are the dinner party anti-Semites, self-regarding and respectable people who recoil at the accusation of racism but are quite happy to trot out modern takes on old tropes. In fact, this has become so pervasive that recent research by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, funded by the Community Security Trust and my Department, found that a shocking 30% of those surveyed believed in one or more anti-Semitic trope. Although a lot of that comes down to ignorance and the need for education, we cannot ignore the role that those in public life play in setting the right tone.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I came across anti-Semitism when I used to live in Swansea, at the synagogue there, and I was absolutely appalled, but it seems to me that it has got worse, particularly with social networking these days. Some people think they can write what they like on social networks and remain anonymous, so will my right hon. Friend guarantee that there will be no hiding places for those people?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that, and I will come onto it later. I know that it is something my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has taken very seriously in the hate crime action plan and she is working with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service as well as providing more resources.

1.[*Official Report*, 18 April 2018, Vol. 639, c. 2MC.]

[Sajid Javid]

Susan Elan Jones: In 15 or 16 countries across continental Europe, holocaust denial is a crime. In Germany, I believe, sentences can go up to 5 years. Does the Secretary of State think there is a case for reviewing the law in this country?

Sajid Javid: We have no plans to review the law on this, because we also value freedom of speech, but of course when it comes to hate speech, whether it is online or offline, we must act decisively. This question has been raised by Members in the past, and if the hon. Lady believes that there is a wide body of opinion in favour of considering it, I would be happy to listen to her arguments.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a specific point, I reported a very clear anti-Semitic mural and image to Facebook, which came back to me and told me that it should not have to be removed, stating the usual reasons for not removing other forms of extremist material. Does the Secretary of State not agree with me that it is a high time we took serious action against Facebook, YouTube, Google and all those who continue to propagate extremist material of all sorts on the internet?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to make that point, because there has been a lot more done in recent years to work with the internet giants—Facebook, Google and others—to get them to do much more to take down hate crime, hate speech and hate videos of any type. He is clearly saying that more can be done. More is being done and the speed at which things are coming down once they are reported is faster than ever before, but I agree with the general direction of his comments. More needs to be done.

Anti-Semitism can be found in both extremes of the political spectrum, far right and far left. The British public has a strong record of keeping those fringes out of major parties and out of this Chamber, but although I would much rather that this issue transcended party politics, as other forms of racism have for a long time, we cannot and must not ignore the particular concern with elements within the Labour party, and nor can we ignore the fact that this increasing concern is correlating with the current Leader of the Opposition and the waves of activists that have come with him. I can understand that acknowledging these facts is not an easy thing to do. The easy thing to do is to displace responsibility by bashing the media or blaming Tory attacks, or worse, as some activists have been doing, intimidating those Labour MPs who have taken a clear stand against anti-Semitism.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend surprised as I am that an Israeli Labour MP told me in Israel last week that the leader of her party has written and dissociated herself with the Leader of the Opposition—not the Labour party, but the Leader of the Opposition?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that. It is clear that, not just at home but abroad, there is deep concern about certain elements of the Labour party when a sister party breaks away from it after decades of such a strong relationship.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con) *rose*—

Sajid Javid: I will take one more intervention, but then I must carry on.

Mr Djanogly: My right hon. Friend will, of course, have received an increasing number of complaints from the Jewish community about the rise of anti-Semitism in recent times. Will he take this opportunity to describe to the House the discussions that he has been having with that community?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will know that my Department, along with the Home Secretary and others, engages in a number of discussions. I will say more about that in a moment, and reassure him on the point.

Clearly I am not a member of the Labour party. I speak about this as a concerned citizen, and as a Secretary of State who is responsible for leading on these matters. I will, however, say a couple of things at the outset. First, the Labour party has a long, strong history of rooting out prejudice in our country, from fighting Fascism to establishing sexual equality to passing laws on racial discrimination, a history of which it should rightly be proud. Secondly, the current parliamentary Labour party includes a host of impressive Members of Parliament who have been unwavering in their opposition to anti-Semitism wherever it may appear.

A few weeks ago I stood in the crowd in Parliament Square and had the privilege of listening to some incredibly passionate speeches, not just from the leaders of the Jewish community but from several Labour colleagues, including the hon. Members for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Eelman), for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and for Dudley North (Ian Austin), as well as Claire Kober, the former leader of Haringey Council. Let me also pay my respects to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for his leadership in chairing the all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism, and for being instrumental in calling for today's debate.

Let us be frank. It is not surprising that in any large group of politically minded activists, a few bigots and oddballs sometimes slip through the net. Over the years, some members of my own party have let the side down on this issue. However, the debate deserves more than attempts to point-score on individual cases. The sensible question is not so much whether someone has ever been associated in some way with these people and their attitudes as whether there is a culture that attracts them and is allowed to fester. Unfortunately, when it comes to the Leader of the Opposition, there are simply too many of his apparently accidental associations to list. As the Board of Deputies of British Jews put it in a letter to the Leader of the Opposition,

“Rightly or wrongly, those who push this offensive material regard Jeremy Corbyn as their figurehead.”

So it really is a question of leadership. Indeed, the first chapter of the Government's new Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper focuses on the need for exactly that, at all levels of society. We did not expect leadership to be such a problem at such a high level, but, as they say, the culture of an organisation starts at the top.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Jeremy Corbyn has just been named. I am a new Member here. Is that something that is allowed in the Chamber—such shameless personal abuse?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I think the Secretary of State was quoting from a letter, but I hope Members are very aware that in all other circumstances he should refer to the Leader of the Opposition not by name, but by constituency.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Did I hear correctly what the Speaker said in his introduction to the debate, when he specified the number of Members who wanted to speak, and also, I thought, asked the Front-Bench spokesmen collectively to speak for no more than 20 minutes? The Secretary of State has already taken 15 minutes of that time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: What the Speaker said was that each Front-Bencher should speak for 20 minutes, including interventions. As the right hon. Gentleman says, there are about five minutes left.

Sajid Javid: Speaking for the Government, I must say that there is clearly more to do, but I believe that we must take the responsibility of leadership seriously. The fight against anti-Semitism is led by my Department in co-ordination with the Home Office, and involves colleagues from across Westminster.

On a practical level, we have increased our funding for security at Jewish schools and places of worship by a further £13.4 million this year. The solid work of the cross-Government working group on tackling anti-Semitism ensures that we are alive to their issues and concerns, and our national strategy for tackling hate crime recognises the importance of dealing with abuse specifically targeted at Jews. The Crown Prosecution Service has made it clear that it will be treating reports of online abuse just as seriously as the offline version. There will be no place anywhere to hide when it comes to hate crime.

That is what we are doing to fight the manifestations of anti-Semitism, but ultimately to win this battle we have to cut out the roots of this weed. The best way to do that and to focus minds is to ask people where anti-Semitism leads if left unchecked. As the Holocaust Educational Trust says,

“when we understand where prejudice leads, we can stop it in its tracks.”

If we are going to stamp out that weed of anti-Semitism, we have to change minds and attitudes.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Sajid Javid: I am sorry, but I must continue.

After all, the holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers: indiscriminate killing is simply where hatred when left unchecked reaches its tragic conclusion. The holocaust began with nothing more than words, but then came the insults, the boycotts, the discrimination; the noxious weed of anti-Semitism crept into everyday life, degrading, denouncing and dehumanising its victims until the stage was set for more.

We cannot assume that modern society is on some inevitable journey towards progressive enlightenment

and tolerance. That is a dangerously naive assumption, as anyone who has read a history book would know. Primo Levi put it simply:

“It happened, therefore it can happen again.”

Lessons from history do not learn themselves. Even the most barbaric events in human history lose their edge over time. Events as recently as one generation ago have less resonance with the youngest generation, so this has to start with education. My own understanding of these issues did not come automatically or from birth, although my father did teach me an early lesson in tolerance about Israel; it came from reading widely and visiting the excellent permanent holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and from visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau. As a parent and a human being, that is a visit that will live with me forever. We cannot all have the sobering experience of standing in that place and places like it, although I would encourage all political leaders to make that journey.

What we can do, however, is bring back those experiences not just to Parliament, but to our universities and classrooms. That is why my Department is, for example, partnering with the Department for Education in supporting the HET and the Union of Jewish Students to expand its “lessons from Auschwitz” programme to help tackle anti-Semitism on university campuses. We also support #StandUp, which tackles anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we are working with the Anne Frank Trust to address hatred and prejudice in some of the most challenging schools. With these measures, we can stop the weed spreading to the next generation.

Finally, and most symbolically, we are supporting with £50 million of public money a new national holocaust memorial and learning centre right beside Parliament. This memorial will be a lasting tribute both to those who died and those who survived. It will also act as a permanent, prominent reminder of mankind’s capacity for darkness through the story of the holocaust and other genocides, but also of the capacity for good by those who refused to look the other way, such as Sir Nicholas Winton.

With that, I would like to end on a positive and optimistic note. Even while hiding quietly in that attic before the Gestapo came pounding up the stairs, Anne Frank still believed in humanity, writing:

“In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.”

The British people are fundamentally decent and tolerant, as are the vast majority of those who are engaged in political activism. The reality is that these tropes did not appear overnight, but now that this brand of hatred has emerged from its dark underbellies, we have an opportunity to focus our minds and defeat it. It is my hope that today will be a milestone, when MPs from all parties put down a marker in this place, in *Hansard* ink, that enough is enough.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Because of the large number of colleagues who wish to contribute to the debate, I will be imposing a five-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches. First, I call the shadow Secretary of State, Andrew Gwynne.

4.35 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): This week, we have been reminded of some of the darkest days in human history as we commemorate the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. More than 120,000 Jewish people were transported to Belsen, a high proportion of whom were children. One of those children was Anne Frank, the very person the Secretary of State quoted earlier. She died with her family only weeks before the liberation of Belsen by British soldiers. While in hiding, she wrote:

“How wonderful it is that no one has to wait, but can start right now to gradually change the world! How wonderful it is that everyone, great and small, can immediately help bring about justice by giving of themselves!”

I hope that all of us in this House today will be able to live up to those words.

I want to begin by addressing the comments made by the Secretary of State. As politicians, we all—and I mean all—have a duty to root out anti-Semitism, but recent events have shown that we in the Labour party need to be better at policing our own borders. The Labour party was formed to change society and to give a voice to the oppressed. Reflecting the existing defects of society can never be enough. It is our responsibility to show that we have zero tolerance of anti-Semitism in the Labour party. There is no place for anti-Semitism in the Labour party, on the left of British politics or in British society at all. End of.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I completely associate myself with my hon. Friend's last three or four sentences. I represent one of the more significant Jewish populations in the country, in Kersal and Broughton, and I have worked with the Community Security Trust over a number of years to try to reduce the number of attacks on Jewish people in my constituency. I have to say that I have never come across anti-Semitism within my Labour party, and I have been shocked to realise that it exists in the party and among people associated with it. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the things we can do to reassure the Jewish community, not just in my constituency but throughout the country, is to deal with any accusations through a proper process as quickly as possible and, where necessary, either throw the accusations out or throw the people out?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and speed is obviously of the essence. We cannot allow any allegations of anti-Semitism to be kept on the back burner. Where there is an allegation of anti-Semitism, we must not only call it out but root it out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andrew Gwynne: I should like to make a little more progress.

As the Secretary of State said, the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of anti-Semitism, and we have written our outright opposition to anti-Semitism into our own party rules. In the light of recent events, however, I acknowledge that much, much more work needs to be done. That includes, among other things, the overdue full implementation of the recommendations of the

Chakrabarti report, including a programme of political education to increase awareness and understanding of all forms of anti-Semitism.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andrew Gwynne: Hold on.

No political party has a monopoly on vice or virtue, but we will put our house in order. Let me be clear today that if anyone is denying the reality of anti-Semitism on the left, they are not doing so with the endorsement of the Labour party or its leader. Prejudice against and hatred of Jewish people have no place whatsoever in society, and every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that they are never allowed to fester again.

I welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue today. It is sadly long overdue. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) has sought support from the Government to bring this issue to the House for several years, and I pay tribute to the work he has done in this House over a long time. I also pay tribute to the work of Rabbi Herschel Gluck and the Shomrim volunteers in London. Rarely do those men and women receive the recognition that they deserve for the commitment that they give to their communities. I also want to pay tribute to the Community Security Trust for its defending of our synagogues and our schools and for its continued work in shining a light on anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I assure him that the House will have recognised the honest sincerity with which he is addressing the issue and will have taken the tone of his remarks to heart. However, in this game of politics that we sometimes play, he will know that actions speak louder than words, and Mr Livingstone remains a member of the hon. Gentleman's party. Mr Livingstone's comments on this issue have become ever more eccentric. I know that the hon. Gentleman is not the decision maker on this, but I am sure he will take it from Members on both sides of the House that if the body politic is serious about this issue, Mr Livingstone's speedy expulsion is required.

Andrew Gwynne: The hon. Gentleman knows that due process is going on and, as I have already said, the procedure needs to be speeded up. I am not going to get into politicking, and there has been some borderline politicking, but there are issues to resolve on both sides of the House. For example, there has been a complaint about the Conservative leader of Lancashire County Council in relation to anti-Semitic views. We all have a duty to call out anti-Semitism and to root it out, whether it is on the right or on the left.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Let me be clear about this: Ken Livingstone claimed that Hitler was a Zionist. That is anti-Semitism, pure and simple. It happened more than two years ago, and there has been ample time to deal with it, so it is a disgrace that it has not been dealt with. Kick him out immediately. It should have been enough when the Community Security Trust, the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Jewish Labour Movement and the Jewish Leadership Council all said that it was enough, but we even had the Chief Rabbi speaking out

and still nothing has happened. It is a disgrace. My hon. Friend should stand at the Dispatch Box and tell the leader of the Labour party that Livingstone must be booted out. Boot him out!

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes his views very clear. I do not share Mr Livingstone's views, which are abhorrent, and the Labour party will go through the processes that are well applied to each and every member of the Labour party. That needs to be done far more quickly, but it needs to happen as it would for any member.

Several hon. Members rose—

Andrew Gwynne: I will not give way as I want to make some progress, because many Members want to speak.

As we have heard, this year's CST report found that hate incidents have reached a record level in the UK, including a 34% increase in the number of violent anti-Semitic assaults.

In last year's statistics, where it could be determined, 63% of incidents were described as being far right in motivation, 6% were described as being Islamist in motivation, and 30% showed anti-Israel motivation.

The CST reports that 88 incidents targeted Jewish schools, schoolchildren or staff, with 50% of those incidents taking place as Jewish schoolchildren made their journeys to or from school. In one incident, fireworks were thrown at visibly Jewish people in public in November; in another, Jewish schoolchildren were hit, kicked and punched on the bus home, but were ignored by the driver when they tried to get help—the children fled the bus at the next stop but were followed, and found safety only after they entered a kosher shop and asked for help. It is a mark of shame on our society that our Jewish schools need security guards to protect their children.

On social media, as we have heard, anti-Semitism is in plain sight on the most heavily used sites. In January 2018, the World Jewish Congress found a 30% increase in anti-Semitic posts since 2016 and almost twice as many posts denying the holocaust.

But anti-Semitism not only appears as swastikas, brown shirts and jackboots; it also haunts our society as coded language and dog-whistle euphemisms. In the 1930s, the terms "usury", "money power", "alien" and "cosmopolitan" were used as coded references to Jewish people. Today, Jewish people in the public eye are marked out as "globalists", "rootless cosmopolitans" and the "metropolitan London elite". It runs through conspiracy theories, as holocaust inversion and holocaust denial, in anti-Zionism and in claims of secret plots against our country that are little different from those seen in "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

In 2011, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), who is now deputy leader of the Labour party, spoke in this House about Fox News propagating disturbing anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about secret plots involving holocaust survivor and businessman George Soros. Those views continue to be broadcast. Only last week, the use of anti-Semitic imagery featuring Soros led to the electoral success of the Fidesz party in Hungary. Thankfully, the importing of those conspiracy theories on to the front pages of UK newspapers generated the outrage that it frankly deserves.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I think we all know that one purpose of holocaust denial is to undermine the moral foundations upon which the state of Israel was established 70 years ago. I have just spent a week in Poland participating in the March of the Living, joining survivors and young people in visiting the places where history's greatest crime was committed. When I first entered Parliament 21 years ago, I never imagined that some in my party would suggest that that horror should somehow be a matter for debate. Will my hon. Friend join me in saying shame on them and shame on any who refuse to speak out against them?

Andrew Gwynne: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The holocaust was a dreadful chapter in our world's history. It happened, and we should never ever forget what happened during those very, very dark days. Those who deny that the holocaust happened need to be called out at every opportunity. They are wrong, and the deeply wrong and deeply hurtful views they spread have no place in a modern democracy.

We have seen the debate change since 2016, with triple parentheses to identify individuals being employed as an online dog whistle to single out targets by white nationalists, neo-Nazis, anti-Semites and those who share their views. Each of the three parenthesis represents anti-Semitic claims of Jewish involvement in mass media, mass immigration and global Zionism. These people even developed an app to help them to better co-ordinate and target individuals. Earlier this year, the CST reported that online abuse had fallen slightly from last year, in part due to improvements in the policies adopted by social media companies and better reporting, but anyone who uses social media can see that this remains a very serious problem.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend is rightly focusing on the dangers of anti-Semitism and the nefarious activities of the far right, but does he not accept that anti-Semitism is one of those areas of public debate where the far left meets the far right, and that if the far left continues to behave in this way, there is a real danger of inciting further hatred and violence against one of our most vulnerable communities?

Andrew Gwynne: Absolutely. As I said earlier, anybody who denies that anti-Semitism exists on the left is not living in the real world. We on the left have a duty to call it out, to root it out and to challenge it every step of the way.

So I do want the Government to act more strenuously with social media platforms to ensure that these abhorrent views are removed, and removed quickly. As the Secretary of State has rightly said, we need to ensure that rightful critique of Israeli Government policy, which is legitimate—as it is against the Government of any nation state—is distinct from spreading the demonisation of Zionism and of the right of existence of the state of Israel itself—that is not legitimate.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that when people specifically target just the state of Israel, whether they consider the Government of Israel to have acted appropriately or not—only the Government of Israel; not the Governments of other countries around the

[*Andrew Percy*]

world with whom they may have similar issues—that can be and very often is a cover for anti-Semitism?

Andrew Gwynne: And where it is clearly a cover for anti-Semitism, we have to call that out—let us be clear about that. But criticism of the Israeli Government, just like criticism of the British Government, is absolutely crucial, because that is part of our democratic process. Those who cross this distinction have no role to play in the struggle to put an end to anti-Jewish oppression within the United Kingdom, and they have no role to play in the process to establish peace and reconciliation in the middle east.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew Gwynne: I will not now, as I need to draw my remarks to a close.

That peace will only come through engagement and deep mutual recognition between the two peoples—a recognition of Palestinians’ struggle for freedom and human dignity; and of the centuries of attempts by the Jewish people to flee forced conversion, violence and expulsion. Jewish oppression affects all Jews, in all economic classes, and the oppression of Jewish people cannot be ended without transforming social injustice as a whole.

I want to make this clear in my closing remarks: Zionism is not an insult. It is not a catchphrase, a code word for racism or imperialism, or a name for unpleasant things done by Jews. It stands for a huge range of beliefs and believers. When we fail to recognise this, we assist those on the extremes as they use anti-Semitism to cover up the roots of injustice and shift the blame on to those who are most oppressed. On Yom HaShoah last week, families across Britain lit candles for loved ones who were lost in one of the most evil acts in modern memory. Families remembered how almost one third of all Jewish people were targeted and murdered because of their faith. This day is a reminder that we all have a duty to ensure that such an event can never happen again. Words never seem able to capture the bureaucratic and calculated way in which such a raw and hideous act was allowed to happen.

We know that monsters exist in our world, but they are too few to be dangerous on their own. More dangerous are those who are prepared to act without asking questions. It is our job—the job of all of us in this place—to ensure that questions are asked, that anti-Semitism is called out, and that anti-Semitism is rooted out wherever it exists. There is no place in British society, and in British politics, left or right, for anti-Semitic views—end of.

4.55 pm

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): This is a difficult debate that I think many of us would wish it was not necessary to hold. Nevertheless, I welcome the tone of the Front-Bench speakers in seeking to tackle such a difficult subject. I particularly welcome the commitment of the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), to stamp out anti-Semitism in the Labour party, although

it was clear from some interventions from Opposition Members that there is a long way to go in achieving that.

Karen Lee: Does the hon. Gentleman think it is appropriate for Members to use, for instance, the N-word? I condemn all forms of racism; does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Sir Graham Brady: I condemn all forms of racism, but there is a danger in suggesting that anti-Semitism is somehow different from other forms of racism—it is not. I hope that the hon. Lady will join me in condemning all forms equally.

As a contributor to the 2015 all-party inquiry led by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I was keen to contribute to this debate. Indeed, I am also keen to do so as a Member who represents a significant part of Manchester’s Jewish community.

This important debate is necessarily short because of the previous business, so I must be brief, but it is worth noting that there is a thread that links the business that we dealt with earlier and the business that we are addressing now. The targeted strikes on Saturday were about drawing a clear line to mark the limits of decent human behaviour, ruling out chemical weapons as too horrible to be tolerated, and stopping them from becoming a normal part of a modern arsenal. Similarly, we are discussing in this debate patterns of thought and behaviour that are not new—they have been the cause of terrible crimes and loss of life in the past—but that must not be allowed to become normal in modern Britain.

The Jewish community in Manchester is the oldest and most established minority community in the city, with many Jewish people having fled there from persecution in the 19th or 20th centuries. There are 2,000 to 2,500 Jewish residents in my constituency, but I suspect that there are many more who identify as Jewish but are not particularly observant. We have four synagogues, including the newest Sephardi synagogue in the country, which opened just a year ago. The community is a model of integration, contributing fully to the wider civic and cultural life of the area, but it also maintains its own religious and cultural traditions. There is an excellent record of interfaith co-operation with local Muslim and Christian groups.

Nevertheless, in Manchester, as elsewhere, there has been an insidious growth in the number of anti-Semitic incidents. The CST has been mentioned. It has been collecting data for the past 30 years, but the past two years have seen the largest figures on record, with the number of incidents rising to nearly 1,400 last year, as the Secretary of State said. In some ways, the most worrying thing about that increase is that unlike some previous peaks in anti-Semitism, it has not been driven by wars involving Israel. Rather, it seems that an increasing minority—often on the extreme right or the extreme left of British politics—have come to regard anti-Semitism as in some way normal or acceptable. It is not.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that we are seeing a particularly sharp increase in anti-Semitism on university campuses? Does he agree that Jewish and Israeli students should absolutely never be made to feel unwelcome in their learning environments?

Sir Graham Brady: I unequivocally agree with my hon. Friend's point.

Some appear to have persuaded themselves that anti-Semitism is something other than racism. They are wrong. It is of course possible to criticise Israel without being anti-Semitic. British Jews themselves often have a lively debate about policy in Israel, but all too often that criticism of Israel blurs into anti-Semitism through the use of language—whether careless or deliberate. In my constituency, recorded incidents of anti-Semitism are thankfully low—five incidents of abuse recorded in the past year. It is much worse in other parts of Greater Manchester, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish will know well, where 53 assaults were reported in the past year.

The greatest fear comes as people sense a change in the climate. There is a greater willingness for some to tolerate attacks on Jewish people. I was powerfully struck by this a few weeks ago when a Jewish constituent in his sixties sat in my constituency surgery and told me that he is now worried about anti-Semitism for the first time in his life.

Last week, my wife and I attended a very moving Yom HaShoah event in Manchester, commemorating the holocaust and the Warsaw ghetto uprising. There was a very clear warning from two of the speakers, Judge Lindsey Kushner and Martin Davidson—Davidson is the author of "The Perfect Nazi" which is about the discovery of his German grandfather's enthusiastic support for the Nazi party before the second world war. The message from both was that the seemingly impossible can happen—that seemingly educated and outwardly respectable people have in the past and could again be anti-Semitic—and that abhorrent attitudes can become engrained or normal. It is incumbent on all of us to stop that from happening by challenging anti-Semitism wherever it arises, by recognising the fear that is being kindled in Jewish communities around the country at the moment, and by understanding where the boundaries of civilised debate lie. This debate is just an important start.

5.2 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): What a depressing issue to have to come to the House to debate. My hope, and the hope I am sure of all Members of this House, is that we all learn something from this debate, as opposed to just debating an issue.

As the MP with the second largest Jewish community in Scotland, dwarfed only by my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), I had the great pleasure last week of joining Glasgow's Jewish community, the kindest, warmest and most generous people one could hope to spend any time with, at the Yom HaShoah memorial event in Giffnock, which I attended alongside the hon. Gentleman.

At that commemoration—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me on this—there was a long, but really insightful lecture by the daughter of the celebrated Rabbi Gottlieb of Glasgow. Such was his reputation among all Glaswegians of the Jewish faith and of none that a civic function was put on by the city's lord provost when the rabbi left Glasgow for Israel.

It is worth reflecting on the history of the Jewish community in Scotland. Scotland is the only country in the world that has never had an anti-Semitic text on

the statute book. Indeed, the Declaration of Arbroath, which is often sung by those of us on these Benches and is one of the oldest surviving medieval texts in existence, specifically refers to Jews and Gentiles as equal citizens.

Glasgow's Jewish community—and Scotland's—have been a precious part of our history, and they deserve to be a precious part of our future as well, because they are a people who have been hunted to the four corners of the world for centuries. All of us in this Chamber this afternoon feel horror and shame that they still feel like a people hunted across the world, the consequences of which, of course, led to some of the darkest moments in our history.

Other Members have mentioned security. I have visited a whole range of museums in the three great cities of Paris, Berlin and New York, but there was only one museum in each city where I had to be searched before I entered. There was only one museum where I had to empty my backpack, check in my jacket and go through metal detectors. It was the Jewish museum in Berlin. It was the Jewish museum in Paris. It was the Jewish museum in New York. This shows a people still feeling hunted, with airport-style security at their museums and security outside their schools. Indeed, silly me thought that I could just walk through the front door at the Yom HaShoah event last week. Instead, I had to tell a security guard who I was before I could go in. Such is the fear and anxiety among the Jewish population in my own home town, as in other parts of Europe and, indeed, the world.

The intimidation and hate has manifested itself in many different ways. The Secretary of State, the shadow Secretary of State and others have mentioned social media in great depth. I am sure that we will hear a lot more about that as the debate goes on. But I want to turn to the issue of Israel and Palestine. It is rather depressing that we cannot debate anti-Semitism these days without coming to the issue of Israel and Palestine. When that conflict escalates, as it does over time, it is unacceptable to expect Jewish people in this country to shoulder any responsibility for that escalation. I do not hold the Muslim community responsible for the crimes of Muslim Governments across the world, so I will not allow anybody to hold responsible Jewish people in my constituency or elsewhere for the actions of the Government of Israel—a Government I have criticised, just as I criticised the Government of Saudi Arabia in one of my first speeches in this House and just as we criticise, rightly, the Government sat on the Benches across from us in this place.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): To avoid any doubt about the message that we in this Chamber are sending today, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we reject anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and any form of racism, and that we absolutely reserve the right to criticise the Israeli Government for illegal settlement and to criticise Hamas for storing armaments in schools or hospital compounds? The two things are separate and different.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. I am an openly gay man. I understand that that might shock some Members. But members of

[*Stewart Malcolm McDonald*]

Hamas would have me hanging from a lamp post if they could get their hands on me.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): But there is a connection.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am not minded to take that intervention.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I will be charitable.

Sir Desmond Swayne: The difficulty is this: when one makes in this Chamber a criticism of the Government of Israel, as I have done, one receives a number of unsolicited invitations to meet various people. Members need to be absolutely vigilant about those people, and what they have said and done, because there is a very grave danger of being lured into precisely the milieu to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Of course it is right to be vigilant, as there are many hidden agendas in different political debates. I always listen to what he has to say on matters pertaining to the middle east, as he is a former Foreign Office Minister.

I return to the displays of hatred, some of which I have seen in my own constituency. The Cathcart Jewish cemetery was once, a few years ago, emblazoned with the swastika in an act of vandalism. A cemetery is a sacred place to go to remember dead people and loved ones. Imagine the horror of seeing the symbol of the gangs who targeted Jews, and gassed and killed them by their millions, in such a place. It would be bad anywhere, of course, but a place such as a cemetery is a particularly poisonous target to choose.

I mentioned the warmth and generosity of the Glaswegian Jewish community. Many right hon. and hon. Members will remember the Muslim shopkeeper in my constituency, Asad Shah, butchered outside his shop, three years ago now, because he wished Christians a happy Easter. It was too much for another man, such that he drove all the way from England to Glasgow to carry out this attack. When that happened, Glasgow's Jewish community were among the first out of the stable to offer support and solidarity in any way they could. In fact, they went to the central mosque in Glasgow to set up a press conference to make it clear that Glasgow's Ahmadi—and non-Ahmadi—Muslim community had their full support.

I turn to the recording of anti-Semitism and action being taken in Scotland. I am sure you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, as in Scotland this is not a matter for the UK Government but primarily for the Justice Directorate in the Scottish Government. In 2016, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities carried out a study called, "Being Jewish in Scotland". Many of its findings should make any Member of Parliament representing Scotland, any Member of the Scottish Parliament or any Scottish councillor deeply worried. It showed us that when tensions between Israel and Palestine escalate, fear levels rise significantly among the Jewish

communities in Scotland. It told us that Jewish people in Scotland actually try to hide the fact that they are Jewish. It will be no different in other parts of the United Kingdom, and that should of course shame us all.

Much work is going into tackling this particular kind of poisonous hate crime. I could say more, but I see some Members getting anxious and I am conscious that a great many wish to speak. As I said, Glasgow's and Scotland's Jewish communities have been a precious part of our community and they deserve a precious part in our future. I am sure I speak for every Scottish Member of Parliament when I say that we can all work together to make sure that it is safeguarded.

5.11 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Last year, I was in Harlow town centre at a street stall, as I usually am on Saturdays, to speak to constituents. Completely unexpectedly, a man who I know to be from the left came at me screaming, "Go back to Israel." It happened so quickly that I was unable to take a photo. However, I know that anti-Semitic acts like this, unthinkable a few years ago, are becoming increasingly commonplace. Demonstrations outside Parliament and Labour party headquarters would not have been well-attended if anti-Semitism was not seen by most as a dangerous and growing problem. That is why I am glad that this very timely debate is going ahead.

Andrew Bridgen: My hon. Friend is from the Jewish community and I am not. Does he agree, though, that we all have a duty to fight anti-Semitism, not because it is the right thing to do and the decent thing to do but because it is essential for the wellbeing of our wider society, as history shows us that anti-Semitism is always the thin end of a very nasty and very wide potentially racist wedge?

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend puts it exactly right and sums up, in essence, much of what will be debated today.

I have been amazed to see guards outside synagogues. The shadow Minister mentioned schools. I remember being at a synagogue where the rabbi said to the Jewish people inside, "Please do not congregate outside when we finish the service because you might get abuse or something even worse." I thought, "How can it be, in the 21st century, when we thought we had escaped the horrors of Nazi Germany, that Jews are told that by a rabbi in a synagogue?"

There appears to be in some sections of the left an accepted belief that all Jews are either Israeli settlers, very rich, or part of the capitalist establishment, and these claims are then linked to even more sinister conspiracy theories.

At best, it used to be acceptable to use the fig leaf of "Zionist" or "Israelite" as a cloak for anti-Semitism. Now, anti-Semitism has got so bad that the people who hate the Jews do not even use those terms any more. Anti-Semitism is out in its naked viciousness for everyone to see. The air has grown tighter; you feel very hot, you undo a button on your shirt and your mouth goes dry. This is still a great country and a wonderful place for Jewish people, but things have changed. I always thought

that this was the greatest country in the world. My father was an immigrant here, having escaped from pogroms in Libya, and I never imagined that one would feel the air tightening in this country.

I would like to give special appreciation for the enormous work of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann)—what a great man he is—and the APPG against anti-Semitism, as well as other Labour MPs, such as the hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who is a good friend of the state of Israel, and many others.

However, I genuinely believe that the current Labour leadership is, at best, turning a blind eye to the problem and, at worst, condoning anti-Semitism. I say that with a heavy heart. I see the membership of dubious Facebook groups, the defence of anti-Semitic murals and the phoney reports produced by the now Baroness Chakrabarti, and they indicate three unwise monkeys: see no anti-Semitism, hear no anti-Semitism and do not speak out against anti-Semitism. That is the first problem.

The second problem is social media. As Front Benchers and shadow Front Benchers have highlighted, the internet has become a sewer for anti-Semitism. We spend so much time worrying about Facebook collecting our data for advertisements, but Facebook and Twitter have become social networks acting as a septic tank in which a disgusting and non-stop stream of anti-Semitic sewage collects. What is even worse is that when someone is a victim of anti-Semitism on social media sites, the duty is on them to get it corrected and not the other way round. Why are books and newspapers rightly punished for the publication of any kind of anti-Semitic content, but social media platforms act with impunity? They should be subject to the same laws as everybody else.

We have to ensure that community leaders and political leaders do everything possible to condemn anti-Semitism in every form it takes without hesitation or equivocation. Leadership has to set an example. We have to do more to support the Holocaust Educational Trust—I have been to Auschwitz with it—and to train teachers. We need to ensure that university campuses are welcoming environments for students of all backgrounds. The Office for Students should play a role, as the APPG against anti-Semitism recommends. The Government must go further in stamping out all extremist terror groups, including proscribing Hezbollah's political arm. People should not be allowed to march down Trafalgar Square and Whitehall waving Hezbollah flags.

This debate is a vital opportunity to bring to the fore the widespread and escalating problem of anti-Semitism. It is also an opportunity to be constructive. Let us go forward, and let the leaders of all political parties unite to condemn anti-Semitic content, deal with the social media companies and do more to educate our people about anti-Semitism.

5.18 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I beg the indulgence of the House to tell my story, which I hope will go some way to explain how anti-Semitism can manifest itself in our country.

I come from a family that is drawn from many corners of the Jewish diaspora: I am of Dutch, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian and Turkish heritage, and I am a mix of both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions.

My Dutch family was traced back to the Jews who were expelled from Spain in the 15th century, and in Britain we found our home. While we are small in number, the Jewish community has proudly been a part of British society and has made many great contributions to all aspects of civic life for hundreds of years.

I grew up in multicultural north-west London and went to a Christian school. I had friends of all faiths and none. I had never seen anti-Semitism as a child, but I knew from my own family history what anti-Semitism was. During a debate in 1938, Commander Robert Tatton Bower MP told my great uncle, the hon. Member for Seaham, across the Floor of the House to “go back to Poland”. The most pernicious and haunting examples came from the holocaust. On my mum's side alone, we know that more than 100 members of her family, aged from four to 83, were sent by the Nazis to their death in the gas chambers of Treblinka, Sobibór, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz, for no other reason than that they were Jewish.

I was 19 when I received my first piece of hate mail—it described me as a dirty Zionist pig—and so started my 18-year experience of contending with anti-Semitism. As a university student and activist, I was attacked from all quarters from the far right to the far left. I had members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an anti-Semitic and homophobic organisation follow me and camp outside my house. I received countless anti-Semitic emails and letters condemning my work as the convenor of the National Union of Students anti-racism campaign. When I was selected as a Labour council candidate in 2009, people publicly challenged how I could possibly represent anyone from the Bengali community because of my faith, and since my selection and election as the Member of Parliament for Liverpool, Wavertree, I have received a torrent of anti-Semitic abuse.

In total, four people have been convicted since 2013 for the anti-Semitic abuse and harassment they have directed towards me. Three of those were imprisoned; they were of a far right persuasion, including a member of the now proscribed National Action organisation. In the wake of one of those convictions, a far right website in the United States initiated the #filthyjewbitch campaign, which the police said resulted in me receiving over 2,500 violent, pornographic and extreme anti-Semitic messages in just one day alone. There is currently one more person on remand, having made threats to my life because of my faith.

I am fortunate—I have said it publicly, and I will say it in this House—that I have a platform, as an MP, that affords me the opportunity to speak out, and I happen to be pretty resilient.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I just want to say on behalf of the House that we are all very glad that my hon. Friend is brave enough to tell her story. For lots of people, it feels difficult to stand up and voice their story. I hope she is able to agree that one day it will all have been worth it to change something.

Luciana Berger: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I will never stop speaking out about all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism.

I say that I have spoken out, but it is important to say that I have been able to speak out because I am resilient, but at a later moment my mental health may mean I am

[Luciana Berger]

not in a place where I have the opportunity to speak out. I am grateful to my family, friends and team of staff, and my constituents and supporters, who serve as a welcome antidote to the bile that gets hurled in my direction. I will not be cowed in using the full force of the law that we have in this country to hold people to account. Having heard victim impact statements read out in court of people who have not been able to speak out—people so negatively impacted that they are now unable to work or to maintain relationships, and who have had their mental health affected—I know that just one instance of racism can have a devastating impact on an individual's life.

I make no apology for holding my own party to a higher standard. Anti-racism is one of our central values, and there was a time not long ago when the left actively confronted anti-Semitism. The work done by the previous Labour Government to move the equality goalposts in this country was one of the reasons why I joined the Labour party in the first place. One anti-Semitic member of the Labour party is one member too many.

Yet, as I said in Parliament Square outside this place—it pains me to say this as the proud parliamentary chair of the Jewish Labour Movement—in 2018, anti-Semitism is now more commonplace, more conspicuous and more corrosive within the Labour party. That is why I have no words for the people purporting to be both members and supporters of our party and using the hashtag JCforPM who have attacked me in recent weeks for my comments, for speaking at the rally against anti-Semitism, and for questioning the remarks of those endorsing the anti-Semitic mural. They say I should be de-selected, and they have called it all a smear.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to put on the record my huge respect for my hon. Friend's dignity in the face of all this, and to pledge my solidarity with her?

Luciana Berger: I thank my hon. Friend for her solidarity, and I am grateful to colleagues who have stood by my side and by the side of many others.

There are people who have accused me of having two masters. They have said that I am Tel Aviv's servant, and called me a paid-up Israeli operative. Essentially, this is anti-Semitism of the worst kind, suggesting that I am a traitor to our country. They have called me Judas, a Zionist and an absolute parasite, and they have told me to get out of this country and go back to Israel.

I am grateful to the Community Security Trust and to the police for their work to keep me and my family safe, and for all that they do for the British Jewish community to keep our Jewish schools and our places of worship safe, but they should not have to do that. When it comes to what needs to be done about it, I know that many colleagues will be putting forward very practical suggestions of what can be done to contend with this very serious issue, but the hurt and anguish of the Jewish community must be understood and must be taken seriously. This is not the time for games or divisive engagement.

For the Government, there is a massive priority to conclude their work urgently, better to protect everyone in this country online from the comments that are made on a daily basis, and just in response to this debate. I

urge the Secretary of State to see some of the comments that are already on Twitter, since we have started this engagement.

And my party. My party urgently needs to address this issue publicly and consistently, and we need to expel from our ranks those people who hold these views, including Ken Livingstone.

We have a duty to the next generation. Denial is not an option. Prevarication is not an option. Being a bystander who turns the other way is not an option. The time for action is now. Enough really is enough.

I want to conclude with the eloquent words of the former Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, who said that "an assault upon Jews is an assault upon difference, and a world that has no room for difference has no room for humanity itself". [Applause.]

5.25 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I suspect that I will not be getting a round of applause, but I have to say that it is a real pleasure in one sense but also a real burden to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), who made a passionate speech. I can imagine what will already be happening on social media after that speech. May I thank her for her bravery? We need more people with her bravery in politics on this particular issue.

Anti-Semitism is racism. There are no ifs or buts—it is simple racism. I want to start by saying that I think Britain is a good place for Jews to live. We are in many ways a beacon in Europe of safety for the Jewish community. I know from my work with the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism just how different the situation is for many Jews in mainland Europe. On a visit to Brussels to see the Jewish community there, I saw people living in genuine fear not just behind security guards in their schools, but behind 10-foot or 15-foot gates with military personnel and tanks outside.

We know how difficult the situation is for French Jews, and the terrible murder of Mireille Knoll—a Holocaust survivor—in France recently is more evidence of that. When I asked young Jews who were students at a school in Belgium whether they saw a future for themselves in Belgium, I was saddened by how many of them said, "Not at all." Not a future for them in Europe.

The situation is not good in Britain, although it is a lot better than that in many parts of Europe and we should recognise that. But there are difficult questions to be asked about anti-Semitism in this country and where it comes from, and we must ask some of those challenging questions. As I heard from our own Chief Rabbi at the global forum on anti-Semitism in Jerusalem just a few weeks ago, there are questions to be asked about certain communities. A recent study undertaken by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research found that certain communities in this country, particularly the Muslim communities, are twice as likely to hold deeply anti-Semitic views. They are also more likely to be on the receiving end—of Islamophobia, of course, and of racism too, so they are victims, but there are issues that need to be raised, and I urge everyone to read Rabbi Mirvis's excellent speech from the global forum on anti-Semitism about this particular issue in that community.

However, we know the real issue at the moment is a rise in anti-Semitism on the left of politics. Some of us on this side of the House who try to raise and address

this issue are sadly accused of trying to smear the Labour party. I have no interest in smearing the Labour party on anything, but nor do I have any interest in allowing what is happening in British politics, in which we are all vested and invested, to continue to happen, because it is disgusting that in Britain in 2018, in mainstream politics, we have people who are able to operate freely and to—

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): On our recent visit to Israel, as my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) said, we met an Israeli Labour MP who said that they were severing their links with the Leader of the Opposition, not with the Labour party. That is the issue and it has to be sorted out at the top of the Labour party to stamp out this anti-Semitism once and for all.

Andrew Percy: Absolutely. The shadow Secretary of State was brilliant in much of what he said and I feel he believes it genuinely. He went on to talk about the far right on social media and the far right in Hungary. Absolutely, there is a problem with the far right. What I did not hear him talk about quite so much, however, are the Labour members who have been defended by some of the people sitting beside him. One Labour member, who said that the Jews were responsible for the slave trade, was defended by a Labour Member who sits behind him.

What I saw throughout this debate was the Leader of the Opposition chuntering repeatedly when anybody stood up and tried to hold him to account for some of the things that people have said and done in his name. This is a leader of the Labour party who found himself not in one, but in four or five racist anti-Semitic Facebook groups by accident. He did not look at the material. He did not read the material. He did not know the material was there. He did not understand the material. He looked at the mural and made a comment on the mural, but he did not know about it. How are we supposed to believe any of this?

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My hon. Friend spoke eloquently in the holocaust debate about the abuse he received during the general election from people campaigning for the Labour party. Why does he think that those people felt able to say, when they touched him, “I now have to go and wash my hands”? That was appalling. Why did they feel empowered to do that?

Andrew Percy: I will talk about those two cases in a moment. One of the individuals is currently on bail thanks to the actions of the South Yorkshire and Humberside police.

I am sorry the Leader of the Opposition has left his place, because he needs to be held to account. The question I would like to have asked him is why he still has not taken the opportunity to respond to the invite from the Labour party in Israel to visit Israel and to visit Yad Vashem. If I have time, I will say something about that in a moment.

What else have we seen? We have seen a campaign group launched within the Labour party called Labour against the Witch Hunt. I made reference to it when I spoke in the Holocaust Memorial Day debate. Labour

member after Labour member has made all sorts of disgusting comments about Jews. I just want to give one example—that of a suspended Labour member, Laura Stuart from Hendon. Reference was made earlier to Sir Eric Pickles, the Prime Minister’s envoy on post-holocaust education. Laura Stuart felt the need to post a picture on Facebook of a photograph from the Holocaust Educational Trust that had been changed to include the words “Zionist fairy tales” and “fat Zionist conference”. A Labour party member did this. There are countless other examples.

I have to say to the leadership of the Labour party: this is in your name by people who are being motivated by the actions of the Labour leader. It is no good pretending otherwise. When you perpetuate a message about a small group of people manipulating the lives of people in this country, you create a space for conspiracy theories.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. First, the hon. Gentleman is using the word “you”. He should not be doing that, as it implies that I am undertaking certain actions. Secondly, robust debate requires a certain amount of moderation. I just ask him to remember that in what needs to be a very respectful debate.

Andrew Percy: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, but how can one possibly be moderate in one’s language when we are dealing with a leader of a political party in this country who has stood up and described people who want to wipe Jews off the planet as his friends? It is very difficult to be moderate in those circumstances. To have stood there—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will be moderate.

Andrew Percy: Madam Deputy Speaker, we will have to beg to differ on whether or not one should challenge individuals in this way, but I will of course accept your ruling.

I just want to finish on one point. I have spent several years campaigning in politics. The last general election was the first time anybody stood up and told me I was Israeli scum, and did so having named the Leader of the Opposition as a motivation for saying it.

5.34 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): When my family helped to form the Labour party in Leeds in 1906, they suffered terribly because of that. The Jewish community in Leeds stood alongside them and supported them. That is why 13 years ago I took on the role of chairing the all-party group against anti-Semitism. I did not expect today, when Labour Members stand in solidarity with our Jewish colleagues and with the Jewish community, not just no solidarity but to be targeted by an organisation called Momentum, which has happened to all of us who stood in solidarity. But worse than that, there is explicit targeting of Jewish members of the parliamentary Labour party because they are Jewish. That is what is going on at the moment.

When I took on this voluntary cross-party role, I did not expect my wife to be sent, by a Labour Marxist anti-Semite, a dead bird through the post. I did not expect my son, after an Islamist death threat, to open

[John Mann]

the door, when he was in the house on his own as a schoolboy, to the bomb squad. I did not expect my wife, in the last few weeks, from a leftist anti-Semite in response to the demonstration, to be threatened with rape. I did not expect my daughter similarly to have to be rung up in the last few weeks by special branch to check out her movements in this country. No, I did not expect any of that.

I will tell you the principles we have operated on, from the very first speech I made on this 13 years ago in this Chamber: every party in this House should look after its own backyard first. I have said that repeatedly on hundreds of occasions since. I have specifically, in private letters to every party in this House, repeatedly challenged anti-Semitism. For years, action was taken, and it was painful action. I am not sure that people in all parties welcomed getting the letters and the discussions that they had with me, but that was the principle that we have operated on, and we have worked cross-party.

I recall that Jewish people used to say when I held meetings, "Is it true that there is a growth in anti-Semitism?" We identified 13 years ago the three forms of anti-Semitism: Islamist anti-Semitism, traditional right anti-Semitism, and the anti-Semitism of the new left. That was all documented and has all been discussed in here. It is not new, and those who say that it is a smear to raise this issue need to publicly apologise and to publicly understand what they are doing, what they are saying and the dangers. It does not end with me and my family. It does not end with Jewish Members of Parliament here. Where this stuff ends is with what happened in Copenhagen, in Brussels and in France repeatedly, including four weeks ago: people murdered because they are Jewish. That is where this ends, and we know where history takes that. That is the reality now.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech, which I wholly associate myself with. Does he share the deep shame that I, and I think many people within the Labour party, feel that incidents have been repeatedly reported—over and over and over again—and yet action has quite often not been taken?

John Mann: It is constant. This weekend in my constituency and last night in my constituency—it is constant. There is explicit anti-Semitism, and then there is the bigger group—the excusers of anti-Semitism, the people who say, "This is something to do with who the leader of the Labour party is and challenging him." No, it is not—in the 13 years I have been doing this—and what Jewish people say to me now is different from what they said 13 years ago, when they asked, "Is it true that there is growth in anti-Semitism?" Five years ago, Jewish people would come up to me and say, "We are concerned that there is a rise in anti-Semitism." I am stopped in the street everywhere I go now by Jewish people saying to me, very discreetly, "I am scared." Young people and old people say, "I am scared." We see what happened in France, in Belgium and in Copenhagen and we understand why people are scared.

People—young Jewish members—are scared to go to a Labour party meeting with me, because they are fearful that they will be intimidated and threatened and that their identity will be challenged. Any Jewish person is entitled to say that they are, to define themselves as,

an anti-Zionist, or a non-Zionist, and I have no right to challenge them. Any Jewish person, as the vast majority do, is entitled to say, "I am a Zionist," and I have no right to deny them that. Those that do are racists. Just a change in language—in the use of the word "Zionist" as a pejorative insult—by the Labour party would alter the dialogue in this country in a very big way.

We all have a choice in what we do. Stand in solidarity with the Jewish Members of Parliament under attack today. That is the role of parliamentarians.

5.40 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on one of the most powerful speeches I have ever heard in this Chamber. I also congratulate other Members, most notably the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). There is no doubt that the debate has been painful listening.

I remember growing up in north London and being taught in school about Anne Frank and the horrors of the holocaust. Although, regrettably, anti-Semitism still existed, there was an assumption that it was dying out—that it was steadily diminishing and that hopefully, one day in the not-too-distant future, it would be confined to history. Sadly, today's debate illustrates that we are very far from achieving that goal. The view that I and my family and friends had back in those days was hopelessly naive.

As it has in the past, anti-Semitism has mutated into different forms and found different outlets. Yes, it lingers in the poisonous rantings of the extreme right, but there can be no doubt that it has been given a new lease of life by radical Islamism and the militant anti-Zionism of the radical left. It has been given a powerful new platform by social media.

I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism and proud to be so. I helped to produce the APPG's groundbreaking 2006 report, which led to far-reaching changes in how we tackle anti-Semitism in this country. For example, it led directly to every police force around the country committing to record anti-Semitic incidents separately and systematically. As we have heard today, the report concluded that Jewish students regularly faced harassment and intimidation on campus in a wholly unacceptable way. It is a matter of deep regret that that continues.

The report noted the presence of anti-Semitism online, but of course what was found in that 2006 assessment is dwarfed by the sheer scale of the anti-Semitic venom that is now on social media, which includes the wholly unacceptable abuse of Members of this House such as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree.

The report was also clear that criticism of the Government of Israel can and does become polluted by anti-Semitism. Such criticism is not, as people have pointed out, anti-Semitic in itself, but equating contemporary Israeli policy with the Nazis most certainly is. So, too, is holding Jewish people collectively responsible for the actions of the Government of Israel.

The journalist Stephen Pollard gave evidence to the 2006 inquiry about his sense of shock when long-standing friends made casual remarks accusing Jewish people of responsibility for the actions of Israel and went on to

express their intention to boycott British businesses that had Jewish managers. Mr Pollard told MPs:

“The story of the Jews has been the same for thousands of years: apparent assimilation, friendship and trust, all of which can disappear overnight. By what arrogant complacency did I assume that in my generation it could be different?”

That is a deeply bleak assessment, and we must ensure that it never comes to pass.

The 2006 report warned:

“It is increasingly the case that, because anger over Israel’s policies can provide a pretext, condemnation of antisemitism is often too slow and increasingly conditional.”

Twelve years on, that has proved to be a prescient statement. It is at the heart of the concern about the failure of the Labour leadership to stamp out anti-Semitism in its party. I found it shocking that the Board of Deputies of British Jews was so worried about anti-Semitism in the Labour party that it felt the need to organise a protest in Parliament Square. I found it deeply disturbing to hear Labour MPs describe the scale of the problem. Perhaps just as depressing, however, was the letter published on Facebook and backed by 2,000 Labour supporters which sought to defend the Leader of the Opposition from what it described as

“a very powerful special interest group mobilising its apparent... strength against you.”

Those 2,000 people resorted to an obvious anti-Semitic trope in their attempt to defend their leader from the allegation that he was not taking anti-Semitism seriously enough.

There can be no place for this in British politics. It is time to act; enough is enough.

5.45 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I am devastated that we are discussing this issue in this place. We should never have had to reach a point at which we are discussing one of the oldest hatreds and how it is back in our political discourse as a norm. However, I am proud to be supported by so many of my friends and colleagues on both sides of the House. Specifically, I stand here in awe of the bravery and strength of my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman). It is their dedication and commitment that inspire and ensure that we stand united against the politics of hate and scapegoating.

Today I find myself in the bizarre position of feeling obliged to state for the record that my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests is in fact accurate and that I have not failed to report any additional employment. Specifically, Madam Deputy Speaker, I feel I must inform you that I am not a CIA spy. I am not a Mossad agent, nor am I an MI5 operative. I can assure people who are occasionally foolish enough to google me—although I would urge Members not to; it can be unpleasant reading—that I work not for the people of Tel Aviv, but for the people of Tunstall. Those are just some of the regular anti-Semitic tropes that have become normal in my world. Let me also make clear—just in case I need to say it—that I am not, and nor have I ever been, a lizard, trans-dimensional or otherwise.

What I am, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a proud trade unionist, a Labour party activist for over 30 years, and a lifelong anti-racist. I also happen to be a British Jew. In three decades of political activism, there has never

come a time when those four parts of my identity have produced any form of conflict—until now.

I used to run HOPE not hate, with the wonderful Nick Lowles. I was the Jewish community’s anti-British National party campaign co-ordinator. I first stood at a demo against the National Front when I was 12. I have spent my life campaigning against the politics of hate and extremism. I have witnessed anti-Semitism and racism from the far right—after all, that is what those people do—and, honestly, I had become desensitised to it.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ruth Smeeth: I will.

Nick Boles: I just wanted the hon. Lady to speak for a minute longer.

Ruth Smeeth: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Over the past two years, however, I have experienced something genuinely painful: attacks on my identity from within my own Labour family. I have been the target of a campaign of abuse, attempted bullying and intimidation from people who would dare to tell me that people like me have no place in the party of which I have been a member for over 20 years, and which I am proud to represent on these Benches. My mum was a senior trade union official; my grandad was a blacklisted steelworker who became a miner. I was born into our movement as surely as I was born into my faith. It is a movement that I have worked for, campaigned for and fought for during my entire adult life, so it was truly heart-breaking to find myself in Parliament Square just over three weeks ago, standing shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish community against the poison of anti-Semitism that is engulfing parts of my own party and wider political discourse.

If the House will indulge me, I would like to read out a small sample of what I have received on social media, but before doing so, I have to thank the dedicated team at the CST who have protected me, shielded me from as much of this abuse as possible, and worked with the police on the occasions when abuse became threats. As others have said, they should not be necessary, but personally I would be lost without them. They have also worked their way through the thousands of pieces of anti-Semitic abuse I have received to provide the following greatest hits, although I must warn the House that my fan-base has shown scant regard for appropriate parliamentary language, so I apologise in advance:

“Hang yourself you vile treacherous Zionist Tory filth. You are a cancer of humanity.”

“Ruth Smeeth is a Zionist—she has no shame—and trades on the murder of Jews by Hitler—whom the Zionists betrayed.”

“Ruth Smeeth must surely be travelling 1st class to Tel Aviv with all that slush. After all, she’s complicit in trying to bring Corbyn down.”

“First job for Jeremy Corbyn tomorrow—expel the Zionist BICOM smear hag bitch Ruth Smeeth from the Party.”

“This Ruth Smeeth bitch is Britainophobic, we need to cleanse our nation of these types.”

“#JC4PM Deselect Ruth Smeeth ASAP. Poke the pig—get all Zionist child killer scum out of Labour.”

“You are a spy! You are evil, satanic! Leave! #Labour #Corbyn.”

[*Ruth Smeeth*]

“Ruth you are a Zionist plant, I’m ashamed you are in Labour. Better suited to the murderous Knesset! #I Support Ken.”

“Your fellow traitor Tony Blair abolished hanging for treason. Your kind need to leave before we bring it back #Smeeth Is Filth.”

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): On behalf of all Members of the House, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend—we are enormously proud of her and everything she does for her constituents—and my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman).

Ruth Smeeth: I thank my hon. Friend.

To move on to my final piece of abuse:

“The gallows would be a fine and fitting place for this dyke piece of Yid shit to swing from.”

This is merely a snapshot, and the comments are those that I would feel comfortable—if that is the right word—to say in this place. It is a glimpse into the abuse that now seems par for the course for any Jew who has the audacity to participate in this political world.

But this is not the worst of it. There have always been racists and anti-Semites in our country, lurking on the fringes of our society—both left and right—and I dare say there always will be. What is so heartbreaking is the concerted effort in some quarters to downplay the problem. For every comment like those we have just heard, we can find 10 people ready to dismiss it—to cry “Smear”; to say that we are “weaponising” anti-Semitism.

Weaponising anti-Semitism! My family came to this country fleeing the pogroms in the 19th century. Of our relatives who stayed in Europe, none survived. We know what anti-Semitism is; we know where it leads. How dare these people suggest that we would trifle with something so dangerous, so toxic and so formative to our lives and those of our families. How dare they seek to dismiss something so heinous and reduce it to the realm of political point scoring. How dare they, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am speaking not just for me, but for the young Jewish people I meet across the country who are beginning to fear they do not have a place. These are young people who are braver, tougher and better than I could ever be—the kind of young people who make us feel that our future is in safe hands, but right now they do not feel safe.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ruth Smeeth: I have run out of time; I am sorry.

There is something more fundamental at stake here than any party’s policy platform or electoral performance: the right of Jewish people to participate in the politics of our country as equals. Last month we heard a plea: enough is enough. I stand here today to say that we will not be bullied out of political engagement, that we are going nowhere, and that we will stand and keep fighting until the evils of anti-Semitism are removed from our society. [*Applause.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I completely understand that colleagues have

been very generous and that interventions have been taken, but I am sure that colleagues will also appreciate that we are very short of time, so after the next speaker, I shall reduce the time limit to four minutes.

5.54 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I start by paying tribute to our colleagues, the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for their sheer determination and the courage with which they have spoken today. It is with a great sense of sadness and anger that I feel compelled to speak in the debate today. It is appalling that, in the 21st century, we are having to discuss the growing tide of anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom. I say this as the daughter of migrants who fled persecution and hate; it is appalling, and anyone who has endured hate crime or been on the receiving end of abusive comments about their religion, their culture, the colour of their skin or their heritage will know just how disgusting and hurtful those comments can be. Many, including myself, had hoped that the attitudes of the past would have disappeared by now, and that we would never see them repeated, yet they feature prominently in our society and our politics today. I hoped that we would have become much more respectful and tolerant as a society.

Racist and anti-Semitic attitudes have festered and brewed on the hard right but also on the left, and there is absolutely no justification for those attitudes or behaviours. There is no justification for people to claim to be emboldened, perhaps through social media, to make vicious and vitriolic comments about the “Jewish lobby” and the “Israeli lobby”, or about “conspiracies”. There is no justification for the stereotypical racist attitudes and abuse that are deliberately targeted at members of the Jewish community in Britain today. It is appalling that we now see anti-Semitism in all forms, and it is right that hon. and right hon. Members across the Chamber have unequivocally condemned those who hold such extremist views.

I pay tribute not only to colleagues but to the Community Security Trust, which has done so much to support the Jewish community and keep it safe. In the community that I grew up in, in Radlett in Hertfordshire, we saw the CST outside synagogues and schools, protecting children and families. Now, however, we see Jewish students at university who feel unsafe because they are being threatened, victimised and targeted. I was shocked to read an account of a debate at City University this year in which a female student was being targeted and experiencing pure hatred. People were taking pictures of her and whispering obscenities in her ear to try to intimidate her. She said that she now felt completely unsafe being a Jew in the city of London. That is shocking and disgraceful, and as politicians, it is right that we should be held to high standards and that we should call out that kind of behaviour.

It is particularly alarming and shocking to hear about what is happening in the Labour party, with Momentum and the hard left now out there perpetrating awful comments and actually celebrating and cheering some of the comments that they are putting out. I pay tribute to the Labour Members who have stood up to anti-Semitism in their party. We must all stand shoulder to shoulder

with them. The hard left's hatred and intolerance for those with different opinions has gone much too far.

We have heard today about the suffering and persecution that the Jewish community has faced for hundreds of years through mass expulsions, persecution and lies. Jewish people have been stigmatised, forced to wear badges and treated with suspicion. In one of the darkest chapters in human history, they were forced to go through all sorts of horrors that we should not have to speak about in this day and age. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to speak up and be a strong voice against the forces of hatred, prejudice and discrimination within our own community. We must ensure that we continue to stand up against the racism and anti-Semitism that we now see across society and across our politics today.

5.59 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): This week, which marks the 50th anniversary of Enoch Powell's hateful "rivers of blood" speech, has reminded me of growing up with mixed heritage in Manchester in the 1980s in the aftermath of the Moss Side riots, when racism poisoned social relationships on the streets of Manchester, in the workplace and in the playground. The fact that we are standing in this Chamber having this debate about anti-Semitism 30 years later shames us all. It is devastating that this generation has not grappled and dealt with the problems that were a persistent feature of my childhood. This House has no right to look away now when the problems are happening again. My party has no right to pick and choose how and when we decide to confront racism in this country.

It is right to say, as a Labour Front Bencher did this week, that anti-Semitism exists across society, but it is wrong to go on and say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) then did, that what is happening in the Labour party is merely a reflection of society, because a particular sort of anti-Semitism has found its home on the far left throughout history. The recent compelling examples that have been levelled at my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) demonstrate exactly that.

What do holocaust denial, references to financiers of the sugar and slave trades, and the horrific mural that recently resurfaced that depicted Jewish bankers profiting off the backs of the poor have in common? It is the demonisation of Jews as somehow wielding illegitimate power, a demonisation which forces people to deny any suffering, especially the horror of the Holocaust. It is a form of racism that instead of looking down, as usual, looks up and argues that because this group supposedly wields illegitimate power it is therefore a legitimate target for the left, which fights oppression in all forms. That particular form of anti-Semitism in our party demands to be recognised. It must not and will not be denied. It has resurfaced in recent years, and I have seen it for myself.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Does she agree that we need urgent legislation to shut down the closed Facebook groups that many of our party members operate in, because that is where this is getting so entrenched?

Lisa Nandy: My hon. Friend is right that we need urgent legislation, but there needs to be a clear message from every single person in this party that such groups and hashtags are not tolerated and that those who use them will be held to account.

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree, but I have also seen such things from other groups. I have just seen a tweet from someone claiming to be a member of Momentum suggesting that those of us who have spoken out about anti-Semitism have taken a bounty of £1 million from Israel to undermine the leader of the Labour party. That absurdity must be rooted out, too.

Lisa Nandy: I have seen one shocking instance of that at a party meeting in the past year, but I have seen acres of it online. It is not a lesser form of racism; there is no such thing. Racism is a disease. It does not exist in pockets; it poisons wherever it is found and it must be dealt with.

In recent months, we have seen a rise in anti-Semitic attacks in Britain, a murder in France, attacks on synagogues in Sweden, and fascists on the march in Poland. It is no wonder that, as one constituent who wrote to thank me for speaking out about the issue in the Labour party said, "People are frightened." Labour has at times been the hope for people who were frightened of racism and anti-Semitism. For me, that is not historical fact; it is personal. My father was part of the small group of people who wrote the Race Relations Act 1976, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Human Rights Act into law and established the Equal Opportunities Commission, and they have had real, tangible benefits for me and my generation.

The Labour party ought to be the light on the hill for people in times of darkness, and it shames us that we are a source of pain because a small group of people has been allowed a voice, and that demands concrete action. Expel Ken Livingstone—it has been nearly two years—deal with the thousands of complaints that are waiting to be heard, and bring in training for members. I call for that not because most Labour party members are anti-Semitic—most, like me, joined because we abhor racism and discrimination every bit as much as we abhor poverty and oppression—but because Labour has a long history of empowering our members, and we are a party that seeks not just to run society, but to change it, and we have a duty to lead.

Those things, taken together, would create a culture in our party in which anti-Semitism could find no fertile ground. I have been a member of this party for 20 years, and what angers me most is the assertion that a person cannot be left wing and stand up to anti-Semitism—standing up to anti-Semitism is a core part of my values.

As vice-chair of Labour Friends of Palestine for the past six years, I have stood together with Jewish and non-Jewish colleagues against illegal settlements and demolitions, and in support and defence of the Palestinian people. I have never been as moved as when I visited the west bank and saw Israeli Jewish mums volunteering in military courts to advocate for the right of Palestinian mums to be heard. It is a disgrace that some in our party seek to divide and sow hatred when those mums have managed to reach across that divide and do the opposite.

[Lisa Nandy]

Anti-Semitism tells us that something is rotten in our society. It is not enough for us to decry the shrill, sour, hopeless dog-whistle politics that we have heard from the other side in recent years; we have to be better. I implore my party today to act.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I call Paul Masterton.

6.5 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): East Renfrewshire is privileged to have the largest Jewish community in Scotland, and I take seriously my role as its representative to defend, support and champion that community. I am honoured to have recently been appointed co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on British Jews, working alongside my friend the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and many others.

The Jewish community in East Renfrewshire retains its history and culture while contributing to life across the west of Scotland. The community grew from the expulsion of innocent men, women and children from the continent and today, as it always has, it gives so much back to this country.

On Wednesday evening, I attended the Giffnock synagogue for Yom HaShoah. I stood as page after page of names were turned, listing the relatives of local community members, all of whom had been killed in the holocaust. Stanley Lovatt from Newton Mearns is Israel's honorary consul in Scotland. Stanley is in his late 70s but I remember inviting him and his wife down to a Downing Street reception, and they stepped into this amazing building, clutching each other's hands, walking around wide-eyed like two giggling teenagers in love. Being here and walking up Downing Street was emotional because it is from this place, from these Benches, that time and again United Kingdom Governments of all colours have defended them and their kin, making them welcome and safe.

Stanley Grossman, again from Newton Mearns, is a champion for his local community and a challenger of anti-Semitism wherever it is found. Rabbi Wolfson, the two Rabbis Jacobs and Rabbi Rubin enrich the religious lives of those who attend shul. They play an active role in the wider community, they are much loved and they forge strong and effective partnerships with other local faith leaders, as the Home Secretary saw for herself when she visited Giffnock in the summer.

But it is not just the acts of individuals in East Renfrewshire who happen to be Jewish that are worthy of noting here today—there are Jewish organisations that do so much. The ongoing care for the community provided by Jewish Care Scotland and Cosgrove Care are a testament to the positive contribution to broader life for which the Jewish community strives. At the Maccabi centre, where people like Sue Faber do so much, we have a youth and sports centre where the community can come together for krav maga, badminton and even the celebration of Jewish adulthood with a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah.

Founded in 1914, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, from its base in Giffnock, works to develop relationships between the Jewish community and other civic and religious groups. It works under the incredible leadership of Nicola Livingston and Evy Yedd to support

the community and prevent and combat discrimination against local Jewish people. They were on the frontline when a sales assistant had acid poured over her head in Braehead shopping centre because she worked on a stall selling Israeli cosmetic products. They were on the frontline when the community woke to find a swastika spray painted on the side of a sheltered housing block with the words—I apologise in advance—"Jewish cunts. Jews out."

In 2013, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities published a report on "Being Jewish in Scotland." They have since produced an update, entitled "What's Changed about Being Jewish in Scotland?" The front cover of that update featured two quotes. The first said:

"I would never before have considered it risky to show my Jewish identity in public. However that is changing."

The second said:

"I used to be comfortable as a Jew in Scotland, but not any more."

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Does the hon. Gentleman, like me and other colleagues from Scotland, want to work towards a place where Jewish people can wear their Judaism with pride?

Paul Masterton: Yes, I absolutely agree. We can show a real commitment to that on a cross-party basis, both through the work we do with each other and in the Scottish Parliament.

I wanted today to talk about real people, British Jews, walking on the streets of East Renfrewshire, because anti-Semitism is not just about the tweet, the picture on Facebook or the mural on the side of the London building; it is about the recipient—the innocent family member, friend, colleague, who is targeted, provoked, attacked, for no reason other than being Jewish. It is about the person made to feel unsafe and unwelcome in their home, and they do not deserve it. These are good people, their contributions to our country are immeasurably positive, and we are letting them down.

I said I spent Wednesday evening commemorating the 6 million Jews killed in the holocaust—the horrifying reminder of where anti-Semitism can lead. Just 48 hours previously, a brick had been thrown through the front door of that synagogue. The quiet determination and resolve of those who gathered in the synagogue hall last week, like that of the thousands who stood a few steps away from this place in Parliament Square, should not be underestimated. It is they for whom we are fighting. We have heard it many times, and we will hear it many more, but it cannot be said too much: enough is enough.

6.10 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Ind): I, like many Jews, love this country because of its tolerance and sense of fairness. We are proud to be British and Jewish, and no one has ever asked me to choose between the two. That is how the vast majority of UK Jews felt until recently, but, sadly, it is no longer the case. A significant number are deeply anxious and insecure. They wonder aloud whether to leave and question whether their children have a future here. One constituent told me how he was recently followed from a supermarket, first on foot and then by car, by a man who shouted at him, "Jews kill Palestinians". A few days later, the same constituent was standing outside his home when a passing motorist shouted, "I am looking for Jews."

Jew hatred has existed through the ages and in every generation—it is the oldest hatred of them all. The Shoah, only 78 years ago, was a unique, evil attempt by the Nazis to destroy an entire people through a barbaric industrial process. But it was also a time when too many nations, including this one, looked the other way and did not do enough to offer refuge to Jews who could have survived. It is so sad that this country is repeating this chapter of shame in its approach towards Syrian refugees.

Anti-Semitism on the left is not new and it did not begin when the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) became leader of the Labour party. Based on the evidence I have seen and my interactions with him, I do not believe he, personally, is anti-Semitic. However, his leadership has attracted new members whose anti-Semitism is pernicious and exposed long-standing members whose use of anti-Semitic language and imagery is shocking. It is also wrong that in the past he has failed to call out ideological allies when their anti-Semitism was clear for all to see.

There are two primary forms of contemporary anti-Semitism that the party must address. The first is imagery and rhetoric suggesting that secret cabals of Jews run the world and are responsible for capitalism's excesses. In this warped world view, Jews are not worthy of protection from racism because, unlike other minorities, they hold power and wealth. The second is hostility towards Israel and the bastardisation of the word "Zionism". Zionism means the right to self-determination of the Jewish people in their own state. Other than for a small minority, it does not mean expansionism or aggression. The left leads campaigns for the right of many minorities to self-determination around the world—why are the Jews different?

As a proud supporter of Israel, I have always supported a two-state solution, opposed settlement expansion and criticised the failure of leadership on both sides, which has led to the breakdown of political dialogue and the freezing of the peace process. People of all faiths and none have the right to criticise the Government of Israel, but many on the left fail to recognise the legitimate security concerns of a country that is surrounded by hostile neighbours on every border who seek a one-state solution, without Jews.

Today, in constituencies up and down the country, too many Labour Jewish members and supporters are being challenged to choose between their political party and their identity. It should never have come to this. I hope the Leader of the Opposition will now reject the false echo chamber of those who tell him that this focus on left-wing anti-Semitism is an attempt to silence criticism of Israel or is being used by party critics to undermine him. They are wrong. It would be a big mistake not to recognise that on this issue the Jewish Leadership Council and Board of Deputies speak for a significant majority, rather than a vociferous minority. Those Labour MPs who attended the Parliament Square rally deserve support, not condemnation. They rightly chose to identify with a minority group who feel vulnerable and angry. As the mainstream party that through history has done the most to fight all forms of racism, it is right that Labour be judged to the highest standards. Zero tolerance must mean zero tolerance. Enough is enough.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

It is obvious that a lot of people want to speak and not everybody is going to have the opportunity. I remind the House that when somebody takes an intervention, it does not add any time to the debate; it only takes time away from other people who have been sitting here and who are not going to get to speak, and that will be a lot of people. I must now reduce the time limit to three minutes. [*Interruption.*] I know that Members will be disappointed, but it is in order to be fair to everybody. We either have a few people at eight minutes or a lot of people at three minutes. I think it is fairer to make it three minutes.

6.14 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Evil happens when good people stand by and do nothing. There is evil running through and infiltrating the Labour party, but it is full of good people and they are trying to do something about it. I commend them, appreciate them and have nothing but respect for them.

6.15 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Anti-Semitism is a centuries-old virus that mutates but never goes away. As we have heard from my hon. Friends, the reality of anti-Semitism is felt every day by many members of the Jewish community. It is present across the whole political spectrum, but this debate takes place against the background of the furore in the Labour party. The refusal to accept and address anti-Semitism in our ranks led to an unprecedented response from the mainstream Jewish community, when more than 1,000 people poured into Parliament Square in their anger and anguish, to protest against the Labour party's inaction in dealing with anti-Semitism.

I commend the 40-plus non-Jewish MPs and peers who joined that rally. Those who denounced the demonstrators as having dubious motives, subject to manipulation, and accused them of using this issue to smear the Labour leadership, must ask themselves whether they would make that allegation against any other minority group. I think not. They should look in the mirror and ask themselves why—why do they regard Jewish people in a different light from all others?

It is a fallacy to believe that people who profess to be anti-racist cannot be anti-Semitic, and that anti-Semitism is confined to the right wing of politics. The notion of conspiratorial, powerful Jews—or Zionists—controlling international capital and manipulating the media for their own ends is to be found on the left as well. It is all too evident in the Labour party's current problem with anti-Semitism.

The small British Jewish community—less than 0.5% of the population—is increasingly disturbed by the growth and normalisation of anti-Semitism. They understand that anti-Semitism comes from all political parties and from right across society, but when that anti-Semitism grows unchallenged in a mainstream political party—a party of Government—they simply feel frightened. Together with feeling frightened, they feel angry and anguished. I share that anguish as I meet, day by day, Jewish members of the Labour party who tell me that they can no longer continue in the party that they once held dear—the party that they now feel has betrayed them. I read with horror reports of Labour Jewish councillors who feel

[Mrs Louise Ellman]

that they can no longer serve as councillors because they are Jewish. They feel that the Labour party is no longer for them. That is outrageous and despicable.

The Labour party—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Very unusually, I shall allow the hon. Lady to finish her sentence.

Mrs Ellman: The Labour party claims that it now recognises the problem; I will believe that when I see action and we no longer have members espousing holocaust denial and equivocation, invoking the Rothschilds, or declaring that the Jews were the main financiers of the slave trade.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Three minutes means three minutes; it says it on the clock.

6.19 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I feel deeply honoured to be able to speak in this debate.

Last week, I had the incredible honour of being in Israel and present at the national holocaust memorial ceremony. It was a deeply moving experience. I challenge anyone to be there and not be deeply affected by the occasion. It helps us to start to understand the impact that the holocaust has had on the Jewish people. Despite that history, the Jewish people are a people of hope, resilience and incredible dignity. It was a great honour to be there.

What I have found from the Jewish people I have met is that they simply want to live in peace. They simply want to feel safe and to feel that they belong somewhere—whether that is in the state of Israel or wherever it is in the world that they call home. They are a people who simply seek to live in peace.

I want to share, very quickly, a couple of things that I learned while I was in Israel that really brought home to me just how tolerant the Jews are. They are, I believe, among the most tolerant and accepting people on our earth today, which is in stark contrast to the way in which they are portrayed by some people.

The most moving thing that I experienced while I was there was to listen to a young British Jew, who has left this country to go to Israel because, as she said, she did not feel safe here. She did not feel that she belonged here. She could no longer see a future for herself in the UK. It should deeply trouble every single one of us in this House that the Jewish people do not feel that they belong in this country any more.

The UK rightly has a proud history of welcoming the Jewish people, but it should trouble us that that is changing. We have heard stories, time and again, of how the Jews are beginning to feel unsafe, how they are beginning to feel that they do not belong here. I do not want to live in a country where that is the case. I believe that every single one of us in this House has a responsibility to root out anti-Semitism, to make sure that we are addressing these issues at their root, and to ensure that the UK continues to be a place—whatever else is going on around the world—which Jews are welcome to call their home.

6.21 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I was born in Egypt in the last year of the second world war as Jews were being exterminated in Hitler's gas chambers. I grew up thinking that we would never forget, yet more than 70 years later here we are debating the issue. Anti-Semitism exists across Europe and across the political spectrum, but I never ever thought that I would experience significant anti-Semitism as a member of the Labour party. I have and it has left me feeling an outsider in the party of which I have been a member for more than 50 years.

I am a Jew. My upbringing has been entirely secular. I have never practised Jewish religious traditions. Neither of my two husbands were Jews. I am a consistent critic of the Governments of Israel. None the less, my Jewish heritage is central to my being.

Recently, my sisters trawled through the correspondence and diaries of my family who came from Germany and Austria. My grandmother, in her early fifties, thought that she was too old to be harmed by the Nazis, but we have the last letter that she wrote to her son, my uncle, in 1941, nine days before she was forcibly taken to a concentration camp in Lithuania and shot and killed in a trench outside the gates. In her letter she said twice, "Don't completely forget me." In a postscript she wrote:

"Thinking about you will help me to endure what is coming...I am sceptical that we shall ever meet again. Who knows when I can even write to you again."

My uncle on my father's side spent much of the war in the Ardèche before he was finally deported and killed in Auschwitz. When I visited Auschwitz, I saw the suitcases of those murdered in the gas chambers and was confronted by a battered brown suitcase with my uncle's initials on it. That moment was utterly chilling for me. All of that is my heritage. It is what I am today. I cannot forget. It is one reason why I joined the Labour party in the 1960s. Labour was the party that fought racism and intolerance. It was the party that defended minorities. It was the natural home for Jews who had been subject to inhumane acts for no other reason than their race, their ethnicity and their religion.

It has been truly shocking to receive vicious anti-Semitic tweets from right-wing extremists, but also from the left. My inbox is nothing compared to those of some of my hon. Friends, but there is a surge of anti-Semitism on the left. In part, it has always been there. There are those who see every Jew as a paid-up member of the Netanyahu fan club, who cannot make a distinction between being a Jew and voicing support for Israel as a place for Jews to live safely, who consider "Zionist" a term of abuse, who deny the holocaust and who hate Jews.

I have never felt as nervous and frightened at being a Jew as I feel today. It feels as if my party has given permission for anti-Semitism to go unchallenged. Anti-Semitism is making me an outsider in my Labour party. To that I simply say, enough is enough.

6.25 pm

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I am not Jewish, but my wife's family is. They helped to rescue people fleeing the Nazis in the years running up to the second world war.

Anti-Semitism is raw, ugly and utterly toxic. As we have heard today, it is a force that is still present in society—albeit adopting, as it always does, new guises in a new era. I pay immense tribute to Opposition and Government Members who have spoken with such courage on this issue today.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) spoke from the Opposition Front Bench about the Labour party's moral mission to renew and turn the corner on this issue. The Board of Deputies has pointed out:

“For...the last two years, the Jewish community has been exposed to a constant drip-feed of antisemitism coming from Labour members.”

It also condemned the

“weak, pathetic and slow response from the Labour Party”

in the face of these incidents. May I just say how much I associate myself with the calls for Ken Livingstone to be expelled from the Labour party? He has no place in our national life in any party or in any way anymore.

What does it say about the willingness of the Leader of the Opposition to respond meaningfully to this criticism, when Labour MPs are telling us the stories that we have heard today or feel compelled to join the protestors outside Parliament because there is no hope of change within it? I am convinced that it stems from the fact that the leadership of the Labour party has been captured by the man who, more than any other, embodies the selective blindness of his political beliefs in regard to anti-Semitism. It is worth noticing that, after defending the despicable mural in Tower Hamlets, the Leader of the Opposition condemned himself in his own excuse. He said,

“I didn't notice the anti-Semitism”.

I believe him, for failing to notice blatant anti-Semitism is precisely the problem. Perhaps he has become immune. The problem is that he sets the tone. I see it in my own constituency. The former Member for Sunderland South, Chris Mullin, tweeted on 26 March:

“Sorry to see Jewish leaders ganging up on Corbyn. Far less anti-semitism in the Labour Party than in other parts of society”, and this was swiftly retweeted by the chair of the South Middlesbrough Labour party. This will not and must not stand.

I am pleased that the Leader of the Opposition has committed to upping his game, but I ask him: will he now utterly dissociate himself from Hamas and Hezbollah? Is he proud that Salim Mulla, who said that Israel was responsible for both the Sandy Hook massacre and for ISIS, is still representing his party as a councillor in Blackburn? Enough is enough, but it can only change from the top and it must change. Today must mark the turning point.

6.28 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Susan Pollock was born in 1930 in Hungary. She was sent to Auschwitz as a teenager and, fortunately, survived. She now spends her days travelling the UK, teaching young people about the evils of racism. I first met her when she came to Dudley to speak at our holocaust commemoration. The second time I met her was three weeks ago, over the road in Parliament Square. She was at a political protest for the first time in her life, and it was a protest against us. Every Labour party member, from the leader down,

should be thinking very carefully when a holocaust survivor—someone who has been in Auschwitz—feels compelled to do that.

Last week I was in Poland, where I met another holocaust survivor who had been in Auschwitz and is now in his 90s. The first words he said to me when he learned that I was a Labour MP were, “Are you not ashamed to be in the Labour party, with all the anti-Semitism?” The truth is that I am deeply ashamed that our party has caused so much distress to Jewish people. We have witnessed appalling anti-Semitic claims. We have seen Labour candidates denying the holocaust. At last year's spring conference, one speaker said, “The holocaust, yes or no?” What does he mean by “yes or no”? Was it right? Did it happen?

I am pleased that the leader of the Labour party has returned, because the current crisis was triggered by the shocking discovery that he had defended a grotesque racist caricature. For three days he issued excuses. Only on the fourth day, with that unprecedented protest planned, did he manage actually to say sorry. Labour party members, all of us, have to ask ourselves what we would be saying—what he would be saying—if a senior member of the Conservative party had defended a racist caricature of anybody else. I am afraid—I want to say this very directly to him—that he spent decades defending these people. Hamas's charter is avowedly anti-Semitic, Hezbollah too, yet our leader describes them as “friends” and invites them to Parliament. Raed Salah, found guilty in court of the blood libel, was described as “a very honoured citizen” and invited here too. Stephen Sizer, a Church of England vicar, was disciplined by his own Church when he spread ideas that were “clearly anti-Semitic”, yet our leader defended him and claimed he was “under attack” by a pro-Israeli smear campaign.

The problem with the hard left is that some of them believe they are so virtuous—they have fought racism all their lives so how can they possibly be guilty? That is why they say that this has been whipped up or weaponised. But do they not understand how offensive it is to victims of anti-Semitism when they are told that they are inventing these complaints? Why do they get angry with the people complaining about racism instead of the people responsible for it? They have a big opportunity. Take this much more seriously, deal with the cases more quickly, kick these people out straight away, and respond properly to the letter that has been received from the mainstream Jewish organisations, the Jewish Leadership Council, and the Board of Deputies.

6.31 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I am not an expert in these matters, but I was incredibly moved when I went to Israel for the first time 18 months ago and visited Yad Vashem, the world's holocaust remembrance centre, and saw at first hand the evidence of the experience of the Jewish people before and during the holocaust, and of the survivors afterwards. I was especially moved by the testament of British soldiers who were joyful at the end of the second world war but absolutely crushed within hours to discover concentration camps where there were mass graves, people on the edge of starvation, and gas chambers.

It is our duty now to speak out about anti-Semitism to make sure that that never happens again, because the lessons of history tell us that the start of an increase in

[*Maria Caulfield*]

anti-Semitism is a slippery slope. As philosophers have said for many years, unless we learn the lessons of history, we are doomed to repeat them. It is no coincidence that not just in the holocaust but in multiple genocides that have happened since, such as Rwanda and Srebrenica, and what is happening with the Rohingya and Yazidi peoples now, there is a cycle of behaviour and a pattern of events that warn us that more is to come.

If we facilitate anti-Semitism, then we are on a slippery slope. We know from the CST that anti-Semitic attacks are increasing in this country. There are now, on average, four attacks a day on Jewish people. There is a 3% increase in such events on last year. There is a 34% increase in violent assaults—the highest tally since 1984. That tells us that something is happening in this country, and there is a duty on all of us to speak out. If we look back at the 1920s and '30s in Europe, we see that that is exactly what was happening then, when synagogues were being deconsecrated, Jewish people were being attacked, and murals were being painted on walls. Is this ringing any alarm bells with people in this Chamber?

I might be accused of overreacting, but history tells us where the direction of travel is going. When we are seeing the democratic process in this country being used to legitimise anti-Semitism, with people who are clearly anti-Semitic being put up for elections, history tells us that we are on a slippery slope. The seeds are being sown now, and this country is in grave danger if we do not speak out. We have a duty not just to speak out but to support those who speak out and are being persecuted as a result. If we think the holocaust could not happen in this country now or at any time in the future, we must think again. It happened, post the war to end all wars, in the best educated country in Europe. It happened then, and now, not through a mass violent struggle but through subtle levels of anti-Semitism, it could happen again.

6.34 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this quite remarkable debate.

As the beneficiary, as I now see it, of white Presbyterian privilege, this has been a humbling and illuminating experience. Like the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), I was brought up in a time and a place where we were taught that this was something of history. Like her, I now realise that it is certainly not something of history—if, indeed, it ever was—and anybody who thinks that it is could do worse than listen to the quite remarkable speeches of the hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth).

The Secretary of State, in opening the debate, said that we should approach this subject with humility, and he is right about that. In truth, this is something that affects us across the political divides, because as political parties, we are reflective of the society in which we live. I confess freely that I have been on something of a journey. When I was first confronted with the spectre of anti-Semitism in our society and in my own party, I was too quick to excuse it, because frankly I could not believe that it could be a feature of otherwise sensible, rational people. I now realise that it is.

We find all around us so much casual anti-Semitism—the clichés, the stereotypes and the references even to “these people”. I now find myself in a position where, when I do see it, I am not prepared to be forgiving in any way, shape or form. It is incumbent on us all who reject it to call it out when we see it.

I do not want to dwell on matters relating to other parties. It appears to me as an outsider looking in that there is a problem within the Labour party, but we would be wrong to think that it is a problem just for the Labour party. If Jewish people do not feel comfortable within the Labour party or any other party simply because they are Jewish, it is a problem for us all who have faith and confidence in our political system.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) said that anti-Semitism was a racism like any other. With respect, and without wanting to get into the semantics, I do not believe that to be the case. For some reason, anti-Semitism and racism are a pernicious force that we find throughout history and throughout the world, as others have said. How we respond to that is up to us. We must not allow it to be a force that divides us. It can be a force that unites us, as long as there is unity in tackling it and rejecting it.

6.37 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is extraordinary not just that we have to debate anti-Semitism, but that it is so much a part of our current political environment. It is fuelled and propagated by social media, but if wider society gives anti-Semitism a space, that appears to legitimise it. Often it is not obvious; it can be subtle enough not to be noticed in a mural at a casual glance. However, anti-Semitism is often overt and is too often propagated in student societies at our universities, which was why the then Universities Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson), had to increase funding to deal with the problem only last year.

We see the frequent and unique demonisation of the state of Israel. That happens only to the Jewish state; nothing comparable happens with any other country in the world. The boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign represents a unique attack on Israel and lends itself to not just anti-Zionism but anti-Semitism. It is the attempted isolation of Israel through commerce, academia and culture. Is it not incredible that we would seek to isolate Israel and to stop businessmen and women, academics, artists and musicians working in and with the state of Israel? Increasingly, Jews in Europe are leaving for Israel. We must deal with anti-Semitism in Britain before British Jews feel they have to leave our land.

6.39 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): In the few minutes available, I want to say that, as a Catholic parliamentarian, I stand in solidarity with my Jewish colleagues in the Chamber today. As chairman of the Catholic Legislators Network and the director of Catholics for Labour, I know that we have to fight anti-Semitism wherever it rears its ugly head.

In October 2015, Pope Francis met Jewish representatives and said in a statement that we had, after 2,000 years, reconciled some of our differences. If I had said that in public 500 years ago, I would have been locked up, and if I had said it 50 years ago, I would have been laughed at, but today, some of those differences have been reconciled. In the encyclical “*Nostra Aetate*” of the second

Vatican council in 1965, born out of the horror of the holocaust, the Catholic Church condemned anti-Semitism and asked for a transformation of the relationship. It was not until 20 years afterwards that Pope John Paul visited the synagogue in Rome—he was probably the first Pope to go into a synagogue since Peter the Apostle—which symbolised that new relationship.

I make a plea to my own party and my party leadership. Two years ago, I stood in central London at the Cable Street commemoration of how, 80 years previously, Jews and Catholics came together to fight the fascists. In that period, 20,000 protesters came together to fight fascism and Mosley, and having pleaded with the then Home Secretary, John Simon, to ban the march, forced the fascists to turn around. My hon. Friends the Members for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) and for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) were both at that commemoration. The Labour party and the Labour movement have a proud tradition of standing up to anti-Semitism in this country, and we must maintain it.

I will finish by saying that power, which is a gift from God, is either coercive or relational, and anti-Semitism is the worst possible type of coercive power. Martin Buber, the Jewish theologian, said, when asked whether God exists, that he exists in the space between us. That means we have to build solidarity with one another, day in and day out, to make sure that we create a better world.

Finally, we can look at scripture—Nehemiah—and see that on the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem after their exile, they built the walls of Jerusalem again. Our party walls have been breached, and it is up to each and every one of us to build those walls again. We can do that, and we must do it quickly.

6.42 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council for organising last month's demonstration, which I attended, alongside many Members from both sides of this House.

Anti-Semitism is not just a problem for the Labour party; we see it across the middle east, in European Union states and, of late, in the USA. However, it is simply not good enough for a party that prides itself on its record of fighting racism and discrimination to offer this is an excuse for its failure to get its own house in order. Next year marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Macpherson report, and some people need to be reminded of its core principle that a racist incident is

“any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim”.

When Jewish people tell us that the scenes they witness at some Labour party meetings, the bile they view on social media, or the words they hear in defence of an anti-Semitic mural cause them great offence, we should not question, ridicule or reject such an assertion, but accept it and tackle it—full stop.

Some say that this is all about shutting down criticism of the actions of the Israeli Government, but that is a pernicious lie. Let there be no doubt, however, that refusing to acknowledge Israel's right to exist, equating Zionism with racism, or requiring of Israel

“a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation”,

as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance puts it, are all forms of anti-Semitism.

A year ago, I apologised to those in the Jewish community for the actions of some in my party. It is a tragic and shameful fact that here we are, 12 months on, and they have been subjected to further anger, pain and hurt. I hope that actions will now speak louder than words, that enough is enough, and that my party—and, most especially, the leadership of my party—will act to drive out anti-Semitism. I hope that Labour can once again be the natural home for all those who are committed to decency, respect, tolerance, fairness and human rights.

6.44 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): This has been an emotional debate, and an emotional debate for me—I came into politics to fight racism and I have never resiled from that position. For me, it has always been the case that racism includes anti-Semitism. Jew hatred is race hatred, and one anti-Semite in the Labour party is one too many.

I begin by congratulating my colleagues—

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: I need to make some progress. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), for Bury South (Mr Lewis), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) and for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on their very powerful speeches, but I think—

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Abbott: I think that I have to make progress.

But if we are going to frame this debate, I would like to quote from a rabbi, Rabbi Gluck, who was mentioned earlier. He happens to be a rabbi in Hackney. He said:

“Minorities, and especially the Jewish community in Europe, are the weather vane of discontent and a wider feeling of insecurity in society, as people look for easy and quick answers to their problems.”

I am sad that we are having this debate, but I am proud to represent one of the oldest Jewish communities in the country. It is my representation of that community for many decades that has shaped my strong views on anti-Semitism. As well as one of the oldest Jewish communities in the country, I have the largest community of Charedi orthodox Jewish people outside New York and, of course, Israel. I have worked with them during all my time as an MP on issues ranging from ritual slaughter to immigration, and that work has included lobbying Ministers for there to be a voluntary aided school.

I want to take the opportunity to raise just two issues that are of concern to the Charedi community, who are not often talked about in this Chamber. One is the rising level of hate crime. The Charedi Jewish—[*Interruption.*] The Charedi Jewish community—[*Interruption.*] The Charedi—[*Interruption.*] I think—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The right hon. Lady has said that she does not want to give way. It is entirely up to her whether she gives way or not, but she must be heard.

Ms Abbott: The Charedi community will want these issues to be raised. One is the rising level of hate crime;

[Ms Abbott]

the other is what is happening with the Charedi community maintained schools and Ofsted. I urge the Home Secretary to meet leaders of the Charedi community and leaders of the Shomrim neighbourhood watch organisation to understand and hear their particular concerns.

On the question of the schools, I can do no better than quote Gillian Merron, the chief executive officer of the Board of Deputies of British Jews:

“We understand that Ofsted has a difficult job to do, but the repeated and increasingly aggressive targeting of Charedi schools is fast becoming counterproductive. While some Jewish schools have a good relationship with Ofsted, the Charedi sector is losing confidence in the inspectorate.”

Sajid Javid: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: The Charedi community has asked me to make these points.

Alex Sobel: Will my right hon. Friend give way now?

Ms Abbott: There has been—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

Andrew Percy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just for guidance, can you inform the House whether a shadow Minister responding to a debate should make a speech with regard to their constituency or should respond to the debate—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No, I cannot. We have limited time. What the right hon. Lady says at the Dispatch Box is entirely up to her and not a matter for me. Is the right hon. Lady giving way to Mr Sobel?

Ms Abbott indicated assent.

Alex Sobel: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Perhaps she was not aware that I was the only Jewish parliamentarian who was not called to speak in the debate.

After the holocaust memorial debate, I was subjected to quite horrific abuse. I shall give one example. Mr Leonard said on Channel 4's Facebook page, “Why is this Jewish Zionazi speaking in the English Parliament?” Does she agree that we need to tackle this not just on social media—we need to take more action there—but right across the political spectrum in our own party?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful that Members have allowed me to speak on behalf of the Charedi community. I want to go on, in the few minutes available—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The right hon. Lady does not have to address any point. What she says is entirely up to her. Now be quiet and allow her to finish.

Ms Abbott: I want to talk about what the Labour party is doing about the issue of anti-Semitism. We are looking at introducing a programme of education, quite possibly delivered by organisations such as the Jewish Labour Movement, and we are emphasising that members have an absolute right to raise the issue of anti-Semitism, including on demonstrations. We acknowledge that dealing

with some of these complaints has been too slow, so we are reviewing and speeding up our disciplinary process. We are looking at the workings of the disciplinary committee. We are recruiting an in-house lawyer and a further three temporary lawyers to help to clear the backlog.

Speaking as somebody who has experienced more online abuse than all the women MPs in all the parties put together, I hope that Conservative Members are willing to take this issue seriously. On the issue of online abuse, I believe that more can be done to make Facebook, Twitter and all the online companies take down both anti-Semitic abuse and other abuse more quickly. I believe that we have to look at the issue of online anonymity. It is because people are anonymous and because of online growth that people say things online to members of the Jewish community and others that they would never say if they actually had to put their name out there. I believe that people should continue to be able to post anonymously, but the companies—Twitter, Google and so on—should consider holding people's names and addresses.

This, as I said, has been an emotional issue. I cannot look into the souls of Conservative Members, but I would like to think that nobody has intervened in this debate with a view of getting party political advantage. We in the Labour party take anti-Semitism very seriously. Nothing is gained by accusing the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition of being an anti-Semite. I want to stand up for the vast majority of members of the Labour party, including some of the most indefatigable fighters against racism and anti-Semitism I know, and say that the vast majority of Labour party members are not anti-Semites, despite what Conservative Members seek to claim. We know what has gone wrong in the past. We realise that there is an issue and we are dealing with that issue. I believe that the public understand that we are serious about fighting racism and anti-Semitism.

6.53 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): This has been an extraordinary and harrowing debate, full of powerful personal experiences. The Government are taking a lot of action to combat anti-Semitism, but I want to tell Members that I will leave the Chamber today even more committed to checking that we are doing all we can and stepping it up where we can.

Many Members have thanked the Community Security Trust, which does such great work. I want to put on record our thanks to the trust. We gave it £13.4 million recently to make sure it can continue its good work.

I also thank a number of the police forces who have been so good at protecting people and making sure that they are well looked-after under this growth of anti-Semitism, which so many politicians have unfortunately been experiencing. I also thank the Jewish Leadership Council and the Board of Deputies of British Jews for their work in raising awareness of anti-Semitism.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way and allowing me, as co-chair of the all-party group on British Jews, to pay tribute to the work of the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council. Let there be no doubt in any quarter of this Chamber that in Jewish schools, Jewish community

centres and shuls in my constituency, it is the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council who speak for the vast majority of British Jews, who are horrified by what they have seen in the Labour party and who I fear will be horrified by the response from our Front Benchers to this debate today.

Amber Rudd: I totally endorse what the hon. Gentleman just said. I apologise for the fact that I cannot mention everybody who spoke so powerfully today, but I thank my Conservative colleagues for their contributions, and particularly the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who spoke so powerfully about his experience. His description of the air tightening is something that I will always remember.

However, this afternoon's debate really belongs to the Labour party, and its Members who spoke so passionately from their own experiences and did not hold back from bravely and courageously sharing them with us. Many of us have heard about some of those, but nothing compared to hearing their personal experiences today. The sheer horror and scale of what they have had to put up with has horrified the whole House.

I particularly thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), who spoke so powerfully of her experience, and of course, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who is well known in this House for his ability to speak freely. As he rightly said, that is not always so welcome, but in this case it was completely welcome. He stands in a position of such authority because he has campaigned so long on this issue, and I say to him that yes, we all stand in solidarity with him.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) described so strongly her personal experience and her appalling description of the term "weaponising anti-Semitism". Again, we share her view and her constituents are fortunate to have such a strong and courageous Member of Parliament. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), who spoke so strongly and referred to the danger of the Facebook groups that can provide such succour and comfort when anti-Semitism is being passed around. It is important that she carefully drew that out as one of the danger areas.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Eelman) also has such a strong history of speaking out so often against anti-Semitism, and spoke of her horror that the Labour party has become a home for it. I also thank the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who put this in such an important personal and historical context. We could have heard a pin drop when she spoke about that. Finally, the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) reinforced the horror, which we share, of people in his party getting angry with people who call out anti-Semitism rather than focusing on the people who are anti-Semitic. It is something that we all wonder at.

This has been an extraordinary and important debate. I believe that the whole House has delivered a strong message to the leader of the Labour party: take action. The leader's words have been strong, and they have been heard again and again, but we have not seen the action that we hoped would follow. If the leader of the Labour party is in any doubt about that, I urge him to listen to the speeches that were made by the people behind him.

They were powerful, emotional and harrowing speeches that were not in any way anti-Labour. Many speakers went out of their way to explain that they had joined the Labour party to combat racism and anti-Semitism. The Labour party is a noble and honourable party, and it is absolutely wrong that this corner of anti-Semitism has been allowed to flourish. He has an obligation to take action. We expect nothing less.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered anti-semitism.

Business without Debate

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE DRAFT HEALTH SERVICE SAFETY INVESTIGATIONS BILL

Resolved,

That this House concurs with the Lords Message of 29 March, that it is expedient that a Joint Committee of Lords and Commons be appointed to consider and report on the draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill presented to both Houses on Thursday 14 September 2017 (Cm. 9497).

Ordered,

That a Select Committee of six Members be appointed to join with a committee to be appointed by the Lords for this purpose.

That the Committee should report by Tuesday 24 July.

That the Committee shall have power:

- (i) to send for persons, papers and records;
- (ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;
- (iii) to report from time to time;
- (iv) to appoint specialist advisers; and
- (v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom.

That the quorum of the Committee shall be two.

That Mr Bernard Jenkin, Mr David Jones, Diana Johnson, Andrew Selous, Dr Philippa Whitford and Dr Paul Williams be members of the Committee.—(*Kelly Tollhurst.*)

SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS (TERM LIMITS)

Motion made,

That this House approves the Fourth Report of the Procedure Committee, Term limits for select committee chairs in the 2017 Parliament, HC 816; and accordingly that for the remainder of the present Parliament Standing Order No. 122A (Term limits for chairs of select committees) shall be read as if the word 'ten' were substituted for the word 'eight' in the text of that Order.—(*Kelly Tollhurst.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Proposal to sell Quibell Fields

7 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Scunthorpe is proudly an industrial garden town and that garden part is very important, so I am proud to present this petition gathered by Cheryl Hassall on behalf of people in Scunthorpe wanting to preserve the green and open space that is the Quibell fields.

The petition states:

[*Nic Dakin*]

The petition of residents of Scunthorpe and the wider North Lincolnshire area,

Declares that proposals for land off Dartmouth Road also known as 'Quibell Fields' to be sold and used for housing, should, instead, be retained for community leisure use and a safe place for children to play.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to intervene with North Lincolnshire Council to safeguard the land off Dartmouth Road known as 'Quibell Fields' for wider community use.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002132]

Livestock Worrying: Sussex

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kelly Tollhurst.*)

7.2 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): When I was successful in securing this Adjournment debate on livestock worrying, I was questioned by some more metropolitan colleagues about what exactly livestock worrying is, with many references to sheep and Wales that I thought were rather unfair. I can inform the House and colleagues that livestock worrying usually involves dogs chasing and mauling sheep or other animals. The direct attack can cause death or severe injury and, in some cases, miscarriage. The stress of the event can cause great harm to the animals, particularly the young.

It is important to put on the record why I have secured the debate. Not only does Sussex have one of the highest rates of sheep worrying in the country, but my local authority, Brighton and Hove, has a municipal sheep flock, of which I believe the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) is a shepherdess and looker. Telscombe, a village in my constituency, also has a municipal sheep flock. The business is not just in private hands but in public hands, private hands and all hands—it affects us all.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear—or perhaps he will not—that I am not standing up to make an impassioned call for the nationalisation of all sheep farming. I congratulate him on securing the debate and he raises an important point; there is more sheep worrying and livestock worrying in Sussex, where both his constituents and mine have the opportunity to walk into open countryside. There is more sheep worrying in Sussex in the average year than there is in the whole of Scotland, and that is not acceptable. I am glad that he secured the debate to raise the concerns of many of our farmers.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I entirely agree. It is also important to put on record the contribution made by farming, not only in Sussex but to our wider economy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I declare an interest, as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union. Livestock worrying costs the farming community some £1.6 million a year, and in Northern Ireland, for instance, about 60% of dog-walkers are letting their dogs off the lead in the countryside. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that more needs to be done to educate dog owners, so that they understand that all the responsibility lies at their feet and their dogs could be put down if they worry sheep or other animals?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I do agree. I shall be dealing with some questions and points that the National Farmers Union and my local farmers have raised with me, which I know have also been raised with a number of other Members.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He is being very generous, and, as a Member who represents a largely urban constituency, he is also

very brave. None of us has suggested that it is the residents of Brighton who are worrying the livestock in the Sussex area.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman supports the Take the Lead campaign, in which many of us became involved recently. Given that some 600 animals have been killed by dogs in Sussex in the last four years or so, the default position must be that dog owners put their dogs on leads when they are around livestock. They need to be educated about that, but if they do not comply, measures must be taken.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Again, I entirely agree. We need to educate, and we need to be able to enforce the requirement for dogs to be on leashes when livestock are in fields. When people do not abide by that requirement, there needs to be punishment to deter others from doing the same.

Overall, farming contributes more than £140 million to Sussex's economy and employs 8,500 people permanently, as well as thousands of seasonal workers. Of course we want to preserve Sussex's natural beauty, but its proximity to the tourism hubs in London and Brighton provides easy access for dog walkers as well as others who are enjoying our countryside. Farmers look after more than 62% of the Sussex countryside, and manage public footpaths that go through their land. It is vital for us to introduce measures to ensure that both livestock and dogs are safe. The end result of an attack can be the shooting of a dog if it is found in mid-attack, and we want to protect dogs in those circumstances. Owners have a responsibility to ensure that their dogs are kept safe, which is why this debate should cover dog-owners as well.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): The hon. Gentleman kindly mentioned me. I should declare an interest, as an urban shepherd in Brighton and Hove.

Many dog owners are not aware of the damage that their dogs can do. They think that the dogs will not attack sheep. However, a dog does not have to attack a sheep physically to worry it. Chasing sheep can be enough to cause miscarriage or even death, because they are very likely to have heart attacks as well.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. The difficulty is that, although most dog owners whom I speak to say, "My dog is perfect: he is a saint"—or "She is a beauty"—"who will do nothing to harm anyone", the fact is that dogs are animals too. They have urges to play with other animals, and they often think that the sheep are enjoying being chased around. Their motivation is not necessarily malicious, although it may be sometimes. Dog owners need to understand the effect of letting dogs off leashes when there are livestock around.

Livestock worrying must be treated as a recordable crime. Dog owners must be given consistent information and act accordingly; farmers must report all instances, and the police must take them seriously. Livestock worrying is one of the greatest problems affecting farmers in Sussex. As we have heard, there are more than 130 cases a year, more than the number in Scotland.

Jim Shannon: At this time of year—spring in particular—when sheep are in-lamb, there is greater onus on dog owners to keep control of their dogs, because dogs chasing ewes across fields can lead to lambs being aborted.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I totally agree. There are already some protections, but they are too weak, particularly around this time of year.

Over the last couple of years in Sussex, we have experienced some particularly bad dog attacks, including the infamous incident in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), where 116 sheep were attacked, and another incident in 2015 where sheep were driven off Beachy Head by dogs. The region is, of course, heavily populated and that, combined with its grazing landscape, means that these conflicts tend to occur more regularly than elsewhere.

Since September 2013, there have been 497 recorded cases of livestock worrying, but that is only the pinnacle of the problem as many farmers do not report; they do not believe the police will follow up and do anything, and therefore we believe the true number of incidents is much higher.

The blight of livestock worrying has cost Sussex farmers £66,000; that is only the recorded financial loss, but the fines have added up to only £2,224. There seems to be a disparity between the punishment and the loss to our farms.

We are also acutely aware that the number of reported cases from dog owners themselves is very low. We might therefore require dog owners to self-report when their dogs do things wrong. I would like to know from the Minister what plans there are to support the police to take action against offenders and prosecute appropriately with repeat offenders, and what plans his Department has made to ensure that farmers can report attacks more easily and to improve signage and information on farms. Despite the tendency of the law to back the livestock keeper, the problem is continually getting worse and there are very few prosecutions. As we have heard, public education has a huge role to play, as does getting a number of successful prosecutions which can be publicised as a warning to less responsible dog owners.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): My constituency lies in Scotland and faces the same problem as my hon. Friend's. Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that this is a UK-wide problem, and that the effect on individual farmers is enormous and often missed in the statistics? These farmers take great care of their sheep and the financial loss is huge, but so is the loss to the structure of the flock.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I agree; I am raising this as a Sussex issue because of the high number of incidents there and because I am a Sussex MP, but this is an issue across the country where we have flocks, particularly that roam near urban areas or where there are towns nearby. Will the Minister consider having an effective public education campaign, building on some of the campaigns that have already been co-ordinated, to make sure that dog owners in urban areas, as well as rural areas, understand that this is an important issue?

Some have called for the Minister to consider developing dog DNA information and DNA testing to help identify dogs. While that might be going a little too far, it might be interesting to know what forensic detail the Department is thinking about employing to track down those responsible. Will the Minister consider changing the law so that dog owners have the legal obligation to report livestock attacks?

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

Ultimately, it must be stressed that the No. 1 job of our farmers is to produce safe, sustainable and traceable food for our communities and country. They can do this only if they are able to farm safely and profitably, and livestock worrying is seriously affecting their ability to do that. For small farmers in particular, livestock worrying is devastating because of the huge impact it has on their productivity. It can set them back many months. This problem is entirely preventable. If there were simply enough awareness of the issue, if we were able legally to enforce a leashing requirement for dogs in fields with livestock, and if we were able to ensure that the police dealt effectively with the problem, we might be able to stamp it out and support our farming communities.

7.15 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I should like to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) on securing this debate. It is particularly encouraging to see him and a number of other hon. Members who represent urban seats showing a keen interest in rural issues. Members representing urban seats are always welcome to our debates that mainly affect rural areas.

The Government recognise that dog attacks on livestock cause considerable stress to the livestock owners, as well as causing serious injury to the animals themselves. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) pointed out, attacks on sheep during lambing can have a catastrophic impact even if there is no physical injury. This can severely affect the welfare of the sheep and the income of the farmer. As the hon. Gentleman said, this is essentially an issue of responsible dog ownership. There is no doubt that we are hearing more and more reports anecdotally that this is becoming a problem, with more and more dogs appearing to be out of control and more and more farmers suffering from the problem than in the past.

A couple of recent reports have looked at the problem in some detail. They are the 2018 "Livestock Worrying Police Working Group Final report" from the National Police Chiefs' Council, and the 2017 report by the all-party parliamentary group on animal welfare, "Tackling livestock worrying and encouraging responsible dog ownership". Those two reports have done much to highlight the scale of the problem and to identify some possible improvements that we could make.

The 2018 NPCC report showed that there were 1,705 incidents across the five participating forces, resulting in nearly 2,000 livestock deaths a year. Those figures are a matter of great concern and show the scale of the problem that we have. Overall there was an increase of incidents across the five forces over the period from 2013 to 2017. Over that same period, 92 dogs were shot as farmers attempted to protect their livestock. It is also worth noting that in 66% of cases, the dog owner or dog walker was not present. There is a real problem with the lack of responsibility being taken by dog owners, as well as problems being caused by stray dogs and by owners not being in control of the dogs in their care.

Among the recommendations in both the NPCC and APPG reports was that the definition of "livestock" in the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 should be amended to include more species that are now farmed,

such as llamas and alpacas, or that we should possibly move away from such definitions and lists and instead have a general description of animals kept for farming. There is also criticism that the 1953 Act is restricted to incidents on "agricultural land" and that it should be broadened to include other areas. Recommendations are also made in relation to allowing police to take DNA samples to help to identify individual problem dogs. The hon. Gentleman raised that point. This would also mean having the power to have a DNA database. There are also recommendations relating to increasing the maximum penalty for offences under the Act.

We will of course look at the recommendations, but I suggest that the police look at using the powers in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to supplement their powers under the more dated 1953 Act when considering taking forward a prosecution, because it is more up to date and applies anywhere, not just on agricultural land.

The 1953 Act relates directly to dogs worrying or attacking livestock. While it was specifically drafted for such incidents, a lot has happened since those days in relation both to the livestock we farm and to dog control legislation. Since the 1953 Act, other legislation with broader powers has been passed. For example, the 1991 Act makes it an offence to allow a dog to be dangerously out of control in any place. The Act also contains a power for a police officer to enter premises and seize any dog suspected of being dangerously out of control. There appears to have been a long-held perception among enforcement agencies that attacks by dogs on other animals cannot be dealt with under the 1991 Act. Indeed, the APPG report considered that as a weakness of the 1991 Act, but the Government disagree with that analysis.

The 1991 Act can be and has been used in incidents where dogs attack other animals. The Act provides a definition of when a dog must be regarded as dangerously out of control. It refers to a dog being dangerously out of control when there are grounds for reasonable apprehension that it will attack someone. However, this definition is not exclusive, and the words of section 3 of the 1991 Act could include, for example, a case where a dog attacks another dog or another animal, and there is case law in this area. In 2008, a Court of Appeal judgment specifically pointed out that the definition of "dangerously out of control" in section 10 of the 1991 Act is not exclusive and made it clear that the ordinary meaning of the words in section 3 of the Act could be applied to any given circumstances. Specifically, the Court said:

"In any event the definitions section, section 10, is not exclusive. It does not read as a matter of construction, 'For the purposes of this Act, a dog shall only be regarded as dangerously out of control...' and then proceed to the definition. Therefore we feel ourselves entitled to go back to the straightforward words of section 3: 'If a dog is dangerously out of control in a public place...'"

We therefore believe that the 1991 Act can be used in cases of attacks on livestock.

However, a further criticism of the 1991 Act was that it only dealt with issues after they had happened. So, in 2014, the Government completed an overhaul of the antisocial behaviour powers. The review resulted in more measures and powers for police and local authorities to intervene before a dog becomes dangerously out of control. The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 contains measures that allow police and local

authorities to take action in low-level incidents of anti-social behaviour, including when they involve a dog. Incidents would include where a dog is causing a nuisance, but where no offence is committed under the 1991 Act. In such circumstances, police or local authorities can take action by issuing a community protection notice to the owner, or person in charge of the dog at the time, to control the dog and stop the nuisance behaviour. Failure to comply with a CPN can lead to a fine of £2,500. Many animal welfare organisations and dog keeping groups have campaigned for the introduction of such early intervention notices.

For more serious incidents of antisocial behaviour, such as using a dog to intimidate someone, there is the criminal behaviour order. A CBO would be used in cases where a court is satisfied that an individual has engaged in behaviour that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress. Also available under the 2014 Act is the ability for local authorities to make public spaces protection orders. PSPOs replaced dog control orders and allow local authorities to place restrictions on dogs in certain clearly defined areas. For example, a requirement might be that all dogs must be kept on a lead—a point the hon. Gentleman and others have raised.

Finally, the police also have the option of taking action under a much older Act, namely the Dogs Act 1871, which shows that this particular challenge is not new. That Act requires a lower level of proof—it is basically on a balance of probability—and under the Act a magistrates court can order anything reasonable to keep a dog under control, including that it be muzzled or kept on a lead in public places. The court can also order that a dog be destroyed.

A wide range of legislation and powers are in place to give both the police and local authorities the ability to act in this area. However, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, there is a key challenge in identifying the dogs responsible for these attacks, particularly in the context that some two thirds of attacks happen when the owner is not present. The legislation obviously relies on our knowing who owns the dog and on our being able to take action against that person. To that end, it is important for all the agencies and the police to work together at local level to gather intelligence on who these irresponsible owners are, and there are some examples of that being done.

Police in the London Borough of Sutton, for example, have been working with other local interest groups to

encourage responsible dog ownership. Secondly—the hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of raising awareness of this issue—the local environmental awareness on dogs, or LEAD, scheme seeks to provide advice to the public on dog issues, to improve dog safety and dog welfare, and to deal with antisocial and inconsiderate behaviour by individuals with dogs in a way that protects and reassures the public. The scheme is aimed at all dog owners in Sutton, whether in private or rented accommodation. The initiative has also been rolled out to other London boroughs, as well as to one or two other local forces. The police are taking action to raise awareness of these issues.

We want to see more of that sort of joined-up work, and I can report that similar examples are now being rolled out in the countryside specifically to address dog worrying. For instance, I am pleased to see that, on 22 June, SheepWatch UK will host a follow-up meeting on the three public strands—police, farming and dog owners—to try to maintain progress and to raise awareness of some of these issues.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of requiring owners to report attacks. A more fruitful way forward is to try to make sure that we take action against those owners who are absent and not taking their responsibilities seriously. I understand what he says, and I am willing to consider his suggestion. However, the problem is that owners who are culpable of having an out-of-control dog are unlikely to want to report it, and introducing a law requiring them to do so might not make such reporting more likely.

The point made in other reports about potentially allowing DNA samples to be taken where there is a persistent, repeated problem so that we can try to identify the dogs responsible might be a better approach.

The hon. Gentleman has made some important points, and we have had a number of important interventions from other hon. Members. This is a very serious issue, with large numbers of livestock deaths and large numbers of incidents. We believe the legal powers are there to address the issue, but he is right that we should take every opportunity to raise awareness of this challenge and to encourage more responsible pet ownership.

Question put and agreed to.

7.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 17 April 2018

[MR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Fly-tipping

9.30 am

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of reducing fly-tipping.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank everyone who responded to the House of Commons post on fly-tipping and the Commons staff who have offered their time and support for this important debate.

Fly-tipping is bad for the environment and bad for public health. It is not a victimless crime, and it has been on the increase since 2012. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates that the clean-up operation alone cost the taxpayer some £58 million last year. Local authorities cleaned up more than 1 million fly-tips last year—a 7% increase on the year before. Private landowners and farmers are seriously affected, too. Nearly two thirds of landowners have been affected by fly-tipping, including farmers and charities such as the National Trust, which experienced 232 fly-tips last year alone.

It is not fair that private landowners are held responsible for somebody else's crime and have to clean up. Several landowners got in touch with us to emphasise that, and I am sure Members here this morning had lots of people contacting them. Waste is tipped in small quantities or sometimes on an industrial scale, with lorry loads, and it is the responsibility of the farmer and the landowner to clean it up. It then becomes their waste, and that is the problem. The National Trust has found that cleaning up fly-tipping forces it to divert money from projects aimed at protecting and enhancing the environment on its land. On average, it costs landowners more than £800 to clear up an individual fly-tip, and in some cases—if a huge lorry load has been dumped in the countryside—it costs much more.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate, which is important to my constituents. He is right to highlight the impact on landowners, but does he also accept that the problem exists in urban areas and local streets? In Old Trafford in my constituency, we have a big problem of fly-tipping in alleyways, which impinges on local householders.

Neil Parish: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I accept that that is indeed the case. Fly-tipping can involve anything from a mattress or a sofa to large quantities of rubbish. Around our big conurbations, certainly in the midlands and other areas, there seems to be what I would call industrial tipping, involving lorry loads of waste, perhaps from hospitals or wherever. Everybody thinks it is being taken away legitimately,

but it is tipped. The closer one is to larger conurbations, the worse the problem, especially for cases involving large quantities.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree with me that there is a correlation between what local authorities charge for disposing of waste and the incidence of fly-tipping? Nottingham City Council cut all charges for small items in 2013 and has seen a drop of two thirds in fly-tipping in its area.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. When it comes to small-scale fly-tipping, if people can go to a tip and not be charged, it encourages them to dispose of waste properly. It seems to have had an effect in Nottingham, and I shall have a series of asks for the Minister at the end of my speech. However, it might not reduce industrial tipping, where people have to pay quite a lot for disposal because of the cost of landfill. That is where there seems to be a major problem.

If we could find who has carried out the fly-tipping, we could impound their lorries and take away their means of operation. That would also send a message to others that it is a dangerous job. We do not need to catch many people operating on an industrial scale if we are prepared to take really tough enforcement action.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): The opportunity for tipping should be reduced. I have been working with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) in Walsall. Our tip is not open all week. Walsall council staff collected 108 fridges in a single day, as reported in our local paper, the *Express & Star*, so I am working to ensure that our tip is open all the time to make sure the opportunity for fly-tipping is reduced and people can dispose of their waste appropriately.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, because dumping fridges is dangerous and the gas in fridges needs to be recovered. Dumping fridges is not only unsightly, but very bad for the environment. If the waste-disposal site was kept open, there would be more chance for people to get there. We must give people every opportunity to do things the right way. Some people will still choose the wrong way, because it is easier to simply throw something on the ground. Some of my own land is miles from anywhere, and I wonder why people take so much trouble to go so far to tip waste when they could probably go to a waste-disposal site. Some places take it free of charge and yet some people still dump it out on the fields.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. On the specific point about how far people go, in some cases they do not go far at all. They simply dump their stuff in their front garden, blighting neighbourhoods for years on end. Does he agree that perhaps more should be done in those cases as well?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. Such cases are probably down to the local authority, which can take action in the case of a local authority property, but if it is not such a property it is much more difficult. It is amazing to see what people dump in their gardens, and then the grass grows up through it and it is

[*Neil Parish*]

really unsightly; it can attract vermin and be hazardous. I will probably put myself into a minefield if I go too far down that route, but it is essential that society behaves in a reasonable manner, so that our neighbours are able to live without unsightliness. Also, it is essential from an environmental health point of view.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. Does he recognise that cuts have consequences? In York, since 2015, the fly-tipping service to pick up the rubbish has been cut from monthly to quarterly cycles and the number of complaints has doubled. In 2016, York Civic Trust's annual report complained that York's streets face decreasing standards of cleaning and rubbish collections.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend—I will say hon. Friend—has made an interesting point. I understand that local authorities are strapped for cash and have to try to make every penny count, but sometimes it is a false economy when they cut the frequency of collections, because there is more chance of people fly-tipping. I shall go on to that later, but she raises a really good point. Sometimes it is counterproductive to cut back on the number of collections. When the local authority has to collect it later, there is a clear-up cost. If everything was taken in the round, it might be more cost-effective just to collect it in the first place.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is being very generous with his time. I congratulate him on securing this important debate. Fly-tipping is a real problem for my constituents in Barnsley East. It is not just a financial problem, but one that scars the environment. Does he agree that local authorities should be given more resources? Also, to pick up on a point that he made earlier, does he think that we should have a zero-tolerance approach to fly-tipping and be much harder when we catch those responsible?

Neil Parish: The hon. Lady makes an important point. It is about the resources that local authorities have, but it is also about how local authorities choose to use those resources. Like many people in this House, I came up through district and county councils, so I know that there is a series of choices to be made even when times are hard. As I said in answer to the previous intervention, local authorities should look at whether it might be more cost-effective to do more collecting, even if money is tight, because the cost of clearing up is probably greater. I therefore put some of the onus back on to local authorities, but I will ask at the end for the Government to work much more closely with local government to try to stop fly-tipping.

Current enforcement rules are not working, as the increase in fly-tipping demonstrates. Fines need to be more severe so that they act as a real deterrent. Jane said that littering should be a crime with instant fines and names recorded. Persistent offenders should be made to pick up litter, and more needs to be done to enforce current laws—I think we would all agree with that. We also need more anti-fly-tipping education. We have many campaigns, but we probably need even more.

If we can get to our schoolchildren and young people we have a greater chance of ensuring that the situation gets better.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency should be given powers to remove vehicles belonging to fly-tippers. That is a really good point, because if we can capture and fine people who have done it, and we can take away vans, lorries and other vehicles, that would send a real message. At the moment, it is too easy to fly-tip, and people feel that the fines they get if they are stopped are outweighed by the fact that they have been able to dump a lot of material that they may have had to pay to put into a waste disposal site. Local authorities should consider reducing or scrapping charges to take away large or bulky items such as white goods—we have talked about fridges—which are among the most fly-tipped items. That would take away some of the incentive to fly-tip in the first place.

When South Staffordshire Council increased civic amenity site charges, the entire area was blighted by fly-tipping, including dumping of rubbish in woodlands, lanes and ditches. If councils scrapped charges at waste disposal sites for people bringing in trailers, and reduced charges for commercial waste disposal, it would encourage people to do it the right way. Local authorities should also consider making waste and recycling centres more accessible to everybody. The point has been made that such sites are not always open, and not everybody can get there on a Saturday morning, or whenever the waste site might be open; sometimes they are open during the week but not at the weekend. There are all sorts of ways we can make it easier. We have to give people every opportunity to do it the right way, and then come down heavily on those who do not.

There is constant fly-tipping in many areas, which undermines the sense of community pride and the community's efforts to look after their area. Does the Minister agree—I am sure she does—that we need to prevent fly-tipping? Will the Minister increase the fines? I am not sure that it is her direct responsibility, but will she ensure that local government and others in Government take the opportunity to introduce extra fines?

To what extent are Ministers working with other Departments on addressing the problem? Naturally, a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is here this morning, but other Departments involved include the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Ministry of Justice. Will the Minister work with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to create an anti-fly-tipping education campaign? We need to talk to the Department for Education, because this all needs to work across Government.

Will the Minister encourage local authorities to work more closely with private landowners so that we can identify fly-tippers and ensure that they are penalised? We need to be on the side of the innocent. That is a really important point. Very often it is left to landowners and farmers to pay large amounts of money to dispose of rubbish that was not theirs in the first place. Will the Minister encourage local authorities to open up access to waste disposal and recycling sites, so that people are not incentivised to fly-tip in the first place? Will the

Minister encourage local authorities to stop charging people to have larger items, such as white goods, taken away?

We must ensure that all parties—local authorities, police, landowners, and the Environment Agency—work together. What can the Minister do on a national level to increase the consistency of the fly-tipping response across the country, so that people who fly-tip know that they have a reasonable chance of being caught? At the moment, people do not feel that they do. What can be done nationally to encourage more local partnerships to clean up fly-tipping? Finally, would the Government support a scheme to allow any landowner affected by fly-tipping to dispose of his or her waste free of charge? Landowners and farmers do not invite fly-tipping, and it is a huge cost to them to clear it up.

9.46 am

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. Fly-tipping is a problem that affects communities the length and breadth of the country, including in the area I represent. That is why I welcome today's debate and congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing it.

Levels of fly-tipping are spiralling across Coventry. The problem is particularly acute in the Foleshill and Stoke areas of my constituency. Those areas are blighted by domestic and commercial fly-tippers targeting streets, shared communal areas and open green spaces, often leaving them strewn with all types of waste. Alleyways are blocked with old mattresses, shopping trollies and even bathtubs. Streets are scattered with litter and bags of rubbish, and our parks are blighted by abandoned sofas and old electrical goods. I have witnessed the impact of fly-tipping on my local communities in Coventry. It is a scar on the local environment, and causes misery to law-abiding residents, affecting how they feel about the place they call home. Moreover, fly-tipping is a financial burden on our local authority that diverts money away from crucial services such as adult social care.

Coventry City Council takes the problem of fly-tipping seriously and is determined to tackle it head-on. It works hard to deter such criminal acts, to investigate and clean up incidents of fly-tipping when they occur, and to penalise those who engage in it. Last year the council prosecuted 35 people for fly-tipping, and it is pursuing 15 cases through the judicial system this year. None the less, the council recognises that more needs to be done to tackle this growing problem, which is why it has earmarked an additional £100,000 this year to create a new mobile team to combat fly-tipping. The additional resource will be used to target areas of the city where there have been high rates of fly-tipping and extra street-cleansing is necessary.

That shows that Coventry City Council is committed to fulfilling its responsibility for tackling fly-tipping at all levels. However, its ability to deal with the growing problem has been severely hampered in recent years by cuts to local government funding. By 2020, the council will have just half the money it had to run services in 2010. Needless to say, that places significant pressure on the provision of frontline services and has forced the council to make tough choices, one of which is to

reduce the frequency of household bin collections in order to save more than £1 million a year. The council recognises that more needs to be done to tackle this growing problem, which is why it has earmarked the £100,000 for this year.

Coventry City Council is a very well-run authority and has been for many years. One of the things we used to do many years ago was provide a bulk lift; every single resident would clear out their attics, gardens and sheds and the council provided the money and the transport to take away the goods. We could not possibly think of doing that anymore. More anti-fly-tipping legislation, or campaigns to prevent fly-tipping or to provide free removal of white goods, are all admirable things, but it does not matter what we do; we need the money to do it. All of those things cost money and that has to come out of the rates. I beg the Minister to look once again at funding for local authorities so that they can carry out these important services for their residents.

9.51 am

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this important debate and echo many of the points made by Members across the Chamber. We certainly do need tougher police action and tougher penalties for people who are caught fly-tipping, and we need to support local authorities. I am sure we would all welcome more funding if we can find it.

I want to make a suggestion that I have not yet heard mentioned by any of the organisations campaigning on this issue—I alert the Minister to the fact that I am that dreaded thing: a Back Bencher with a plan and a scheme. I would welcome her comments on this, as I have been giving the matter a great deal of thought, because this is an issue in Monmouthshire. I fully support the measures that have been set out and want to add another thought.

A particular problem, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned, is that the liability for any fly-tipped waste lies with the landowner. I suggest changing the liability and pushing it back towards the people who produce the waste in the first place. I started thinking about that after reading an article a couple of weeks ago—I think it was in *Farmers Weekly*, although I could not find it again—about a farmer who had had waste tipped on his land. He went through it and was able to establish where it had come from, then went back to the originators of the waste, who were able to say who had received the waste. As a result, a prosecution was brought against the cowboys who had taken away the waste. That made me think that there is room for some kind of voluntary licensing scheme, a little bit like that in force for anyone who wants to be a door supervisor.

In other words, we would give an organisation like the Security Industry Association the power to accredit anyone who wants to move away waste. Those who want to take away waste can apply for a licence—there would obviously be a charge for it—and would be able to establish themselves as legitimate operators. They would have to undergo training. They would not be able to breach any health and safety rules or tip waste illegally or they would lose their licence.

[David T. C. Davies]

What about the people who produce the waste? Under a voluntary scheme, they would have the choice of going either to an accredited waste tipper or somebody not accredited, who might be cheaper. To make the scheme effective, anyone who chose to use a non-accredited company to remove waste would then become liable if that waste ever turned up somewhere it was not meant to be. It would clearly also be possible to make this a mandatory scheme, but that would involve a certain amount of extra paperwork and bureaucracy.

That is not a panacea, of course, but it is one of a number of moves that we could think about. It would get people who produce waste, whether small businesses or householders, thinking about whether they use one company that is a bit cheaper or another that is accredited. Using the accredited company might cost a little more, but they would not run the risk of having somebody knocking on the door in the months to come and demanding payment of a bill of thousands of pounds in order to remove waste that has been illegally tipped. It would quickly raise public awareness of the problem, because any company that had paid for a licence to get itself accredited would be making that very clear in its advertising, whether on websites or elsewhere. It would alert the public to the fact that, frankly, there are a lot of cowboys out there going around breaking the law. I offer it as a simple, constructive policy idea and I hope that the Minister might consider it.

9.55 am

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): This is a very interesting topic, and one that I raised with the Minister in my own debate not so long ago. It will come as no surprise to her that we will be covering many of the same points again.

For me, there is a clear difference between fly-tipping, litter louts and waste disposal sites. At one end of the scale we have the litter louts—those who drop litter out of car doors or who cannot be bothered to dispose of their cans and their plastics. At the other end of the scale we have properly managed and licensed sites for dealing with waste that will ultimately get recycled or sent to landfill. The fly-tipping piece is in the middle, and I believe that it needs to be separately recognised.

The Minister has done an excellent job of looking at how to tackle litter louts. This year she has increased on-the-spot fines and default penalties and has recently introduced a provision whereby those who chuck things out of their car windows can be held to account. I say all credit to her. With regard to waste sites, she has said that there should be provision to lock them and that rogue operators should be not only fined, but forced to clean up their own mess. I commend all of that, but I maintain that we still have a gap in understanding what we mean when considering fly-tipping.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Quite a lot of the litter that we see on the sides of our roads comes from commercial vehicles that have not necessarily deliberately fly-tipped; they might be items that were not properly secured on the vehicles. That is certainly the case in Dorset, and I daresay elsewhere across the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that is an additional category that should be looked at when we consider fly-tipping?

Anne Marie Morris: That is a very interesting point. That goes into the litter category, which the Minister has already begun to legislate on, and I would expand the category to cover that. In a sense, it is largely about intent. I think that littering is generally about being careless, which such a van owner would be, whereas fly-tipping is driven by economic gain. The formal sites are in a different category all of their own, as licensed operators. I urge the Minister to look at this more sensibly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) has indicated, an important part of this is making the public aware.

A point about the responsibility and liability for those who create the waste was raised earlier. They are already liable and responsible under section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. They are responsible for using those who dispose of waste in an appropriate and legal way. If they use an unlicensed organisation, they are responsible and can be fined. The problem is not that the legislation is not there; it is that it is incredibly hard to enforce.

With regard to raising awareness, there are some very simple things that could be done. First, every bin could have a label on it that says, “Be warned: unlicensed fly-tipping is illegal”—something catchy that makes people wake up to the fact that they are responsible and can be fined. There should be something making exactly the same point on every council tax bill that goes out. There are ways and means of doing this. If people realise that they can and will be fined, that will make a big difference.

For many of the cases in my constituency, the challenge has been evidence. Unless there is a photograph showing the dumping being done by a particular vehicle, the licence plate and the individual doing the dumping, it is hard to get a conviction. We should look at the evidence test, because perfection can be the enemy of the good. There are clear guidelines for holding people responsible that we cannot move beyond, but we must review the evidence that is required and look at what is reasonable in these circumstances to enable a conviction.

The agencies involved include the DVLA, which has been mentioned. The challenge is that the DVLA uses data protection to withhold information about the vehicle owner, as has happened to a number of my constituents. When I challenged the DVLA, it said, “Oh no, we normally give evidence in those circumstances,” but that is not the case. The Government should look at the stakeholders involved and at what we can do to enable such evidence as is available to be used.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making some excellent suggestions. A constituent came to see me at my surgery this Saturday to report commercial fly-tipping in Eccup—a small village on the outskirts of my constituency. He said that large commercial vehicles are dumping waste and suggested a national CCTV programme in hot spots to catch the evidence. I think CCTV is part of the solution to fly-tipping.

Anne Marie Morris: It is a very expensive solution. If we could do what the hon. Gentleman describes at a reasonable cost, that would be wonderful. He makes a good point, but in the countryside the cost of putting CCTV cameras around every single location would be

extremely high, and making them impossible to dismantle would be a real challenge. It is a great idea for cities, where they can be put in inaccessible places, but the challenges in rural areas mean that it is not a viable solution.

The Minister should also review the licensing scheme. At the moment there is a grey area: it is unclear who has to be licensed and who does not. The Minister ought to look at increasing the number of bodies that are required to have licences. It should not just be those disposing of a certain quantity or type of waste; we should require any vehicle capable of disposing of waste to have some sort of licence.

There is also an issue relating to tracing the vehicle and the material being dumped. Currently we use tachometers and a number of other things to track commercial vehicles. It seems to me that if we issue a licence to a vehicle, we should include something to record where they have gone in a central system, so that when there is tipping we can check the recording. Nowadays, screwing metal barcodes to white goods is pretty common, so there must be a way of tracing the origin of white goods that are dumped. We should look at that for the future. Perhaps we should do what we do with cans and bottles: people should get their money back if they take their white goods to the tip.

One of the problems for most farmers is that insurance is prohibitively expensive. At the moment, something like 17% of farmers are insured, and the rest are not. The consequence is that the clear-up of fly-tipping is extremely costly. It seems to me that the insurance companies have a part to play in resolving that problem and making insurance much more achievable.

I have given the Minister a couple more ideas since the last time I spoke on this matter, for the residents of Devon and Teignbridge, in particular. I would very much like her to look at creating a new strategy specifically for fly-tipping, rather than for litter louts, which I think she has done a grand job of dealing with, and formal waste disposal sites.

10.4 am

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I am very pleased to be able to speak in this debate on fly-tipping. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for securing it. Fly-tipping is a blight on many of our communities, both rural and urban. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that it is counterintuitive for local authorities. This is about local priorities, and I am afraid that it was not a priority for the previous Labour administration on my council.

My constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South have seen a number of incidents of this nature in the past, but I am pleased to say that the now ever-diligent city council is taking a stand and has a zero-tolerance approach to environmental crime. Although far too many alleyways and open spaces are blighted by this horrific behaviour, I am delighted to report that the recent results show vast improvements locally. The perpetrators face swift justice and are taken to court.

I do not plan to speak at length, but I want to bring hon. Members' attention not only to the increasing problem of illegally dumped waste but to the deeply concerning industrial-scale black market industry that has developed as a consequence of it. My hon. Friend

the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) has done a considerable amount of work on this subject with the excellent Staffordshire fire and rescue service. She asked me to mention the Slitting Mill waste fire in her constituency, which took many months to extinguish. This issue affects many constituencies around the country, and I hope we can secure another debate on it soon.

The case of the Slitting Mill fire throws into sharp relief the huge problem that fly-tipping on a commercial scale can cause. There is a huge risk of fire and environmental damage, and it blights the aesthetics of our communities. Those risks are amplified when the dumping takes place close to critical infrastructure, where any fire is likely to compromise vital services—not to mention the devastating economic implications and disruption that can follow.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is talking about the aesthetics of areas, and very serious matters including the health and safety implications. Does he agree that it is imperative that local authorities and Departments realise the economic implications? The old adage that we never get a second chance to create a first impression applies when we are talking about visitors, tourists and potential inward investors. We need investment to ensure that local areas benefit.

Jack Brereton: I totally agree. This is about inward investment and tourism, too, and fly-tipping detracts from that. It is important that we have a zero-tolerance approach to this unacceptable behaviour.

Stoke-on-Trent has experienced the dire consequences of waste being stored illegally. Hanbury Plastics—a site that never held an environmental permit to store waste—went up in smoke initially in February 2017, with a subsequent fire in November. I should declare a personal interest; the site is only about 600 yards from my home. At its peak, the site contained about 10,000 tonnes of waste. The Environment Agency continually issued legal notices to reduce that to a safe level of about 1,500 tonnes. The situation has been ongoing since 2014, yet the various agencies involved are seemingly powerless to act. Clearly, it is too late to prevent what happened at those sites, but many other waste sites around the country continue to operate above the law.

Julian Sturdy: My hon. Friend is making a really good point. The term “fly-tipping” seems to cover a huge variety of waste—from black bin bags thrown out of a car on to the street, to the industrial waste that my hon. Friend is talking about. Does he agree that industrial fly-tipping is part of a wider criminality, which needs to be tackled? We need to ensure that local authorities work much closer with our enforcement agencies such as the police.

Jack Brereton: I totally agree. A black market is emerging around fly-tipping, with links to numerous other crimes. It is helping to fund other criminal activities.

The former Twyford factory in Stoke-on-Trent is another such site. I have corresponded with the Minister about it previously, so she knows about it. It poses a huge risk, with former industrial buildings now overflowing with flammable waste. This is a site right next to the west coast main line and the A500 trunk road. If it were

[Jack Brereton]

to be set alight, there would be untold consequences right across the region. On further inspection, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service has gone to the lengths of saying that, in that scenario, it would probably be far too dangerous to attempt to firefight it. That is not to mention the likely damage that a fire would cause to the railway. Services would be disrupted and the smoke plume could even result in the closure of the M6.

The current legislative framework is far too complex, with responsibilities often split across competing agencies such as the Environment Agency, local authorities and the fire and rescue service. Clearly, there is a vital need for improved legislation to combat the increased number of illegal waste sites and inevitable fires, and for measures to deal with the consequences. As the situation stands, the complexity of the law leaves holes for underhand behaviour. The current scale of the problem was not envisaged by the existing legislation, which is particularly concerning given the organised nature of illegal waste sites, with frequent links to more extensive crime networks.

The Government have already made significant progress to ensure that action is taken, but more is needed to beef up those powers and to ensure that more robust powers are available to those agencies and decisive action can be taken. It is important to consider what more can be done to ensure that the cost burden of the extensive emergency response and the eventual clean-up of those sites does not continue to be felt so significantly by those agencies and by the Government, who can ill afford it. It would be encouraging to hear how the Government can help agencies to recover some of the costs from the rogue businesses that perpetrate those crimes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr George Howarth (in the Chair): Order. Could the two remaining speakers be mindful that I will call the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30? I am sure that there will be ample opportunity for them to make their case. I call Kirstene Hair.

10.11 am

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for bringing to the floor a problem that is a big issue in my constituency.

In Scotland, more than 26,000 tonnes of litter are illegally fly-tipped every year. There are around 62,000 separate fly-tipping incidents every year, costing Scottish taxpayers more than £11 million. While the maximum penalty for this crime is substantial in both England and Scotland, the use of a scale means that it is rarely meted out. In truth, the minimum fine on both sides of the border is typically less than £500. As such, although there is still a criminal penalty, on the rare occasions that a fly-tipper is caught, they can often escape with a slap on the wrist, even though a much stronger punishment is required.

In Angus in a five-year period, 1,870 incidents were reported, but only two prosecutions were made. Fly-tipping makes our communities less clean, less attractive and less pleasant places to live. It lowers people's enjoyment

of their own communities through no fault of their own, reduces house prices and can even pose a safety hazard.

It should be a basic responsibility of local government to ensure that communities are kept clean and that any fly-tipping is dealt with swiftly. Simply taking note of some fly-tipping and leaving it to be dealt with at a later date is not good enough. Local authorities owe that to the residents they serve. We have heard that different councils face different fly-tipping challenges; for example, Angus is a rural area that has to have a different approach to fly-tipping from that of a more urban area. Larger rural areas such as Angus naturally have more remote spaces where fly-tippers might choose to dump their rubbish. It is easier, therefore, for fly-tipping to go unnoticed for longer periods of time.

The residents of Angus have risen to the challenge of tackling this issue. I have been deeply impressed with the efforts of constituents such as Mrs Jacquie Steel who, along with groups such as the Angus Litter Summit, has selflessly organised community groups to pick up litter along rural roadsides. Additionally, through initiatives such as the adopt-a-street scheme, Angus residents assume responsibility for a specific part of their town and tend to it diligently.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a very good point, and I agree with a lot of it. Increasingly, local people take it upon themselves to try to help in their community. Does she agree that enforcement alone will never be the sole answer to change behaviour, and that we need more prosecutions to be seen through?

Kirstene Hair: I will come on to that point. Many hon. Members have said that we need visible prosecutions on a regular basis to discourage others from partaking in such activity.

To a significant degree, the fight against fly-tipping is about area, and rural councils simply have larger areas to patrol and to clean. That is why it was absolutely right for Angus Council to keep recycling centres open across the county. Our party took the right approach—Angus Conservative councillors were key in delivering that decision, whereas Scottish National party councillors wanted to close centres and reduce services, which undoubtedly would have increased fly-tipping in my constituency. Rural councils also have to consider larger areas that are relatively secluded and have no CCTV, reducing the possibility that an offender might be caught in the act. Fly-tipping relies in large part on the assumption that there is next to no chance of getting caught. We need to correct that assumption so that, as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) mentioned, fewer people will take the risk.

Rubbish that has been dumped by fly-tippers often includes evidence that could lead to an offender being caught. Police must seek out that evidence insofar as is practicable. We can and should take a more proactive attitude to fly-tippers. That would lead to more offenders being punished and, given the right amount of publicity, less rubbish being dumped around our communities. A preferable step would be to establish a specific hotline for those in rural settings, to ensure that offenders can be pursued swiftly. Only through rapid prosecution will we deter others from partaking.

I strongly believe that we must start at the beginning, by changing our culture of litter. We must tackle this issue in our schools, making sure that children know from a young age that this type of behaviour is entirely unacceptable, what and how to recycle and how to make more conscious decisions about how we consume and reuse everyday products. Moreover, the less unnecessary packaging we have, the more recyclable packaging and items we have and the more we encourage people to recycle, the less rubbish there will be for people to dump illegally. I am pleased that the proportion of rubbish that is recycled is increasing both in Scotland and in the UK, but there is still more to be done.

I commend this UK Government's commitment to reducing plastic pollution, which is particularly important for the marine environment in coastal communities such as Angus. The impact of plastics is high on the political agenda, as it should be if we are the generation to tackle the issue. A serious joined-up effort that includes all levels of Government and the police, taking a range of different approaches to the issue, can reduce fly-tipping and make all our communities even better places to live and more appealing for tourists to visit for many generations to come.

10.17 am

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for providing us with the chance to discuss a hugely frustrating issue.

My constituency marks the point at which London's metropolis turns to beautiful countryside. As such, it has become the victim of fly-tipping on an industrial scale, as I am sure is the case in many other outer-London constituencies. There is money to be made in the business. Waste management licences are given to what look to innocent customers like legal waste contractors but turn out to be cowboys or organised criminals who dump materials from the city's building sites into our environment.

Since my election, I have been talking to Conservative council representatives in Havering to discuss what we can do as a team to tackle this problem, which continues to be raised by local residents. In October, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published figures from 2016-17 that showed that local authorities in England dealt with around 1 million fly-tipping incidents—a 7% increase on the previous year. During this period, my borough dealt with more than 4,000 such incidents. The total cost of fly-tipping to Havering residents and businesses between April 2016 and March 2017, including collection and disposal costs, is estimated to be well over £500,000. We now fear that the overall cost is closer to £1 million, which represents a huge burden on the local ratepayer.

I have been working with Councillor Jason Frost, the deputy cabinet member for the environment, to push for increased local authority fines. I met the Minister at one of her Tea Room surgeries to discuss the problem further, and I was encouraged that she and her Department are taking it seriously. The maximum penalties for fly-tipping on summary conviction are a £50,000 fine and/or 12 months' imprisonment. However, although sentencing guidelines for environmental offences were reviewed in 2014, the maximum fixed penalty notice that local authorities can issue remains only £400 for

small-scale fly-tipping. Councillor Frost believes that the fines need to be much more substantial to act as a proper deterrent.

Havering already uses to the maximum existing anti-fly-tipping measures, including joint police operations with covert officers, round-the-clock monitoring of roads, and surveillance cameras. However, as Steve Moore, our director of neighbourhoods, has advised us and a number of Members mentioned, much fly-tipping is now carried out by serious organised criminal gangs, not just casual chancers. Those gangs use false plates and stolen trucks, so traditional means of combating fly-tipping, such as CCTV, are not effective. Therefore, although increased penalties might help, we may well need to go further. If this is an issue of organised crime, it requires an equally organised response by police and other authorities such as the Environment Agency.

New regulations have given the Environment Agency and councils more effective tools to investigate and prosecute waste crimes, including the power to seize vehicles for a wider range of suspected offences. However, I should be grateful if the Minister advised us what further analysis has been undertaken of police operations to ensure that we understand who is behind such crimes, and what work the Environment Agency is doing to make its waste licensing regime much more robust. Will she also say why she thinks there was such a substantial increase in this problem in the latest year for which we have figures? Was that increase driven in any way by changes to environmental regulations or the cost of processing rubbish? Is it possible that well-intended changes have made waste disposal so expensive that people are cutting corners? I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton, and I look forward to learning more about the Minister's strategy to tackle this scourge.

10.21 am

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this topical and important debate, which has been extremely interesting and informative, with many excellent contributions. The hon. Gentleman pointed out that the cost to the National Trust of dealing with fly-tipping diverts funds from more worthy projects. That illustrates the general point about fly-tipping across the country. I strongly agree with him about impounding vehicles, which could be done fairly simply. He made the good point that we need to be seen to be on the side of the innocent, and everyone here should agree with that measure.

Many Members made interesting points while discussing concerns about fly-tipping in their local communities. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) expressed serious concerns about whether cuts to local authority funding are a false economy. I believe that prosecutions in England were at a record low in 2017. The hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) illustrated well the problem in her area and reiterated the real cost of austerity to her communities.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) has obviously given the problem a lot of thought, and the interesting accreditation scheme he mentioned seems worthy. What the hon. Member for Newton Abbot

[John Mc Nally]

(Anne Marie Morris) said about labelling chimneys with my thoughts about bins. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) made a good point about installing cameras in hotspots. We can count either the cost of doing something or the cost of not doing something, and I agree with him that we need to do the former. The hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) made a good point about fines not being substantial enough. I totally agree with her that they are too weak.

I will outline the measures that we are taking in Scotland to tackle the problem of fly-tipping and littering, which is without a doubt a national embarrassment and leaves us all with a sense of bewilderment and total frustration. It is a blight on our villages, our parks, our rivers and coastlines, and our towns and cities. Fly-tipping threatens our health and diminishes the beauty of the countryside in all parts of the UK—and it is all avoidable.

We do not always have to see the whole staircase; we just need to take the first step. Combating the underhand and antisocial problem of fly-tipping is a positive move towards protecting the environment. Fly-tipping is illegal for a reason: it is dangerous, ugly and terrible for our communities. There are even links between rubbish building up on our streets and increases in crime. It is mystifying that the wretched habit occurs even in areas of great natural beauty, such as Loch Lomond. Like others, I keep asking why people do it. Are they uneducated? Do they not care? Is it laziness?

As was mentioned, people travel miles to dump waste. Last year, I visited the Selby and Tadcaster area as chair of the all-party flood prevention group. I was shown around by the assistant of the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams). He pointed out that several heavily liveried lorries seemed to have travelled vast distances to fly-tip—to dump their hazardous waste—in his beautiful countryside. That is unacceptable, and I hope the perpetrators have been caught and severely punished.

It seems to me that fly-tipping is simply the result of costs and the operations of unregistered cowboy businesses and organised criminals, many of whom provide what they call white van pick-up services to people in our communities. For many—from micro businesses to larger organisations—costs are at the heart of the problem. We have all heard horror stories and been approached by local action groups who care about their communities. Lots of us work closely with non-governmental organisations and local authorities to try to address the environmental risks and costs to public health with public money, which would be better spent on other projects to benefit our communities.

My researchers tell me tackling fly-tipping and littering in Scotland is estimated to cost at least £53 million a year. I note from the paper that the Local Government Association produced for the debate that fly-tipping alone costs more than £57 million a year in England. Last year, more than 1 million incidents of fly-tipping occurred in England and Wales, and there were more than 40,000 incidents in Scotland. That represents a 7% rise in England and Wales and a small decrease in Scotland.

The Scottish Government are committed to developing a more circular economy, which will benefit both the economy and the environment. Last October, the Scottish

Government and Zero Waste Scotland published their strategy for improving waste data in Scotland. Tackling fly-tipping is a key priority for Zero Waste Scotland, which is the Scottish Government's resource efficiency delivery partner. The charity Keep Scotland Beautiful—I know many of its great staff—also works tirelessly in the community to educate and nudge people into good behaviour and awareness. If we feel frustrated, that must seem like a never-ending battle for them. How do we and those organisations get the message across that we all live in a common home and that as individuals we must realise that our actions count and that every right step we take will lead to positive change?

With Zero Waste Scotland, the Scottish Government have developed a communications toolkit for delivery partners, with the aim of improving understanding of how products and materials flow through our economy—waste flows—from the point of production to the final destination. We hope that that will raise awareness among everyone involved in the waste industry. In 2013, the Scottish Government set up a national environmental crime taskforce, which co-ordinates the efforts of local authorities, regulators, police and other stakeholders to tackle environmental crime, including waste crime. The tools and guidance on offer include FlyMapper, an app that Zero Waste Scotland made for local authorities and land managers. Importantly, that lets stakeholders report and map fly-tipping and identify growing problem areas in real time. There is also a behavioural change marketing campaign to discourage fly-tipping and littering, and we have introduced legislation to increase fixed penalties for both littering and fly-tipping.

We could do more, and I would support measures by any Government, Department or public body to issue fixed penalty notices. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has new powers to discourage large-scale fly-tipping, and both SEPA and Revenue Scotland are taking action to recover landfill tax from illegally deposited waste. In addition to the FlyMapper app, the Dumb Dumpers website and helpline allow fly-tipping to be reported 24 hours a day.

Scotland is slightly different from the rest of the UK, in that I believe the figures used to make estimates in England in Wales are more than a decade out of date and do not include waste dumped on private land. Will the Minister confirm whether that is true? The Scottish figures do include such waste, but sadly, since reporting is voluntary, they could still be gross underestimates. This practice must not be allowed to continue. As someone with a deep commitment to environmental issues, I fully support the ambition of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton to rid us of this scourge.

10.29 am

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), the Chair of the Select Committee, on hitting the jackpot so early on in our recovery from the Easter break. Next to potholes, this is one of the more popular topics on which people engage us, more than anything because of the unfairness of it—if fly-tipping takes place on their land or next to them, it becomes their problem. He is right to highlight it, and I know the Select Committee will continue to look at waste as a major topic of interest.

I will not go over the facts and figures, but we have had good contributions from the hon. Members for Angus (Kirstene Hair), for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), and from my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher). Others contributed through interventions, which will be on the record.

Fly-tipping is a major problem. We start with people dumping stuff casually, thinking they can get away with it. That is wrong, but at the other end of the scale, this is a major billion-pound criminal business. Next to people trafficking, the drugs trade and, dare I say, a little around the meat trade—we will pass over that quickly—this is the big business of the criminal underworld. People make millions out of it, so we cannot pretend it is something to ignore.

We have heard some of the facts and figures on how local authorities are affected, and there is the implication that, with the cuts and so on, they have found it difficult to up their game, but I will concentrate for the moment on the Environment Agency, which has also faced cuts in this area. I understand that it deals with 1,000 illegal waste sites a year, taking enforcement action, cleaning up and trying to prevent it from happening again, but it has been said to me that it is a bit like whack-a-mole at the fairground—I am a great animal lover—because every time the mole is hit, it comes up somewhere else. That is because of two things: the amount of money to be made out the business, and the way we deal with it in terms of fines and action, which is far too limited nowadays.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) sent me something she would have spoken about if she could have been here—she sends her apologies; she had a prior engagement—about a firm in her constituency that effectively set up a mini-incinerator, burning all the time. It took a lot of action to get it shut down. When the firm came to court, a sentence of a £750 fine was imposed for one offence—the second offence could not be prosecuted—which was reduced to £562, with £374 costs, and the director responsible was fined £199. According to her, the nonsense went on for weeks and weeks, and the penalty bears no resemblance to the inconvenience caused. That shows how limited the fines and ability to do anything are.

First, I will start with a question to the Minister—she has plenty of time to think about it. At a private briefing that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton and I went to, I was surprised when she said there is no evidence of an impact on the level of fly-tipping when local authorities put charges on collections for larger items. It would be good to get some empirical evidence, because that is not the view outside this place—it certainly is not that of constituents who I have talked to. My local authority did not charge for it while next door in Gloucester city they always charged and—dare I say it—Gloucester city's larger items seemed to find their way into Stroud district; but we now charge, and I do not understand how that has not had an impact. It may not have been that much, but there has been talk of a 7% increase last year and it is coming from somewhere. If she could tell me about that or say there is an investigation to look at the impact, that would be useful, because we must have that empirical evidence.

Secondly—I have already talked about this—the fines regime is totally inadequate for today. It is based not just on the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 but on the Environmental Protection Act, which dates back to 1990. Some of the ways to prosecute and the fines regime are therefore nearly 30 years out of date. I know we update the measures, but as much as I love seeing the Minister at various Delegated Legislation Committees on this topic, it needs to be looked at as a whole. As I have said before—I hope the Government will take this seriously—the Opposition will co-operate in any way possible to update the 2005 Act. One of the problems is that there is a lack of strategy. We need one, because it is a big criminal business at one level, and it is really annoying for a lot of people. We are therefore willing to help in whatever way we can to make that Act fit for purpose, with a new Bill.

That is important, because certainly in England the recycling rate has begun to stall—in fact, in some parts of the country it is beginning to decline. I do not see the rush to incineration as anything other than the wrong solution, but there is a real requirement to recognise the problem of waste. I get countless emails from people saying, “We’ve got to do something about plastics,” and we have got to do something about waste overall. I therefore ask the Minister to take up that offer and, through the DEFRA team, see if something can be done in the next Session.

This issue exercises not just individuals and areas but organisations. We have had excellent contributions from the Country Land and Business Association, the Local Government Association, the Countryside Alliance and the National Farmers Union—and, as always, a good paper from the House of Commons Library—which all indicate how big a problem it is and how much we need to do.

I will conclude to give the Minister an awful lot of time to respond—no doubt, she has an awful lot to say, because this is a big topic. I hope we can see this not just as ad hoc misbehaviour—bad as it is—that needs to be dealt with. We must also look at the other end: the criminal and the organised, where people are making serious money and we are not bringing them to justice. Last week, I made a trip in my area to look at some of the notorious sites. Even if we do bring individuals to justice, the fines regime and penalties are so paltry that people can build up for them as a matter of course, and they get away with it time after time. People may build genuine businesses from that—that may be good or bad—but it is not right to use illegality to get there. I hope the Minister sees this as a good opportunity to be forthright about the ways in which we can move forward. The Opposition will help the Government in any way we can.

10.39 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing the debate. We have heard wide-ranging contributions from other hon. Members, recognising some of the work that has been done and some of the challenges still before us. I welcomed the opportunity to discuss fly-tipping with my hon. Friend at a recent event

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

hosted by the CLA, which led me to take action to investigate the issue further. He will be aware that this is a long-term issue that needs to be tackled.

Fly-tipping really affects our country. That is why we have done more, and will continue to do more, to stamp out this anti-social crime that blights not only our countryside but our urban streets, and costs our economy greatly. My Department works closely with organisations across government to tackle fly-tipping, including local authorities, the Local Government Association, the Environment Agency, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We also encourage strong collaboration between local councils, the police, the Environment Agency, and local landowners and communities, to tackle this issue.

My officials recently met a number of fly-tipping partnerships to discuss and review their models. We will work with the National Fly-tipping Prevention Group to disseminate the information and increase collaboration and intelligence sharing on a local, regional and national scale. My officials are engaged with the police at a national level through the National Police Chiefs' Council, and with police and crime commissioners. Indeed, tomorrow my officials will discuss fly-tipping with the police and crime commissioner for Dorset, who is the fly-tipping lead for the National Rural Crime Network. A representative from the National Police Chiefs' Council rural crime team also sits on the National Fly-tipping Prevention Group, which is chaired by my officials.

I am aware of the difficulties faced by individuals and businesses when fly-tipping occurs on their land. Landowners have a legal responsibility for their land, which is why we encourage them to secure it against fly-tippers, always to report incidents of fly-tipping to their local council and the police, and swiftly to clear fly-tipped waste so that the site does not become a known dumping ground. Through the National Fly-tipping Prevention Group we publish advice for landowners of all types of private land, from farmland to industrial estates. The potential use of cameras was mentioned, and although a national CCTV network is unlikely, I am conscious that many landowners use CCTV to try to tackle and identify individuals who are dumping waste.

Neil Parish: Cameras that are easily portable and can be put in trees are not so expensive now. We must catch many more people doing this because there is still too much pressure on the landowner and farmer to clear up the mess. They did not create the mess, but they end up with the cost of maintaining the environmental condition, and that is what infuriates everybody. We should do anything we can to encourage people to have some sort of camera, and to work more with the DVLA and others to catch the people driving the vehicles and bring them to book.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend mentions the DVLA, and often the Data Protection Act 1998 is used as a way not to pass on information. I am happy to take that issue away and discuss it with a Minister from the Department for Transport. He also mentions the challenge of costs. If somebody is convicted of fly-tipping, the landowner or occupier can pursue a court order under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to get the costs

of the clearance reimbursed. I encourage councils and other agencies to keep going with attempts to convict, and to try to help private landowners.

Dr Drew: Does the Minister accept that satellite technology now means that it is difficult to hide the things that people used to be able to hide? That is something the Department could consider more seriously. Such technology is already used in some parts of the United Kingdom, but that would be a good venture for DEFRA to take up.

Dr Coffey: I do not know whether satellite technology would help us in this case, and I am not an expert on how best to present evidence to get a conviction. However, I will certainly ensure that the point is understood by my officials, so that they can raise it with the National Fly-tipping Prevention Group and the police.

Local councils, as the responsible authorities, have a significant role to play in tackling fly-tipping on private land. Fly-tipping gangs dump waste irrespective of whether the land is publicly or privately owned, and all local councils should therefore investigate fly-tipping incidents on private land. If there is evidence, they should prosecute the fly-tippers, and they can then recover clearance costs via the courts, as I have just outlined. However, not all councils are minded to do that, and only about half are actively trying to tackle the issue.

I am very alert to the challenges regarding council resources. The hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) praised her council but was concerned about the available resources. I gently point out that although Coventry City Council's website states that support from central Government has fallen—in 2010-11, £153 million came from the revenue support grant and business rates, and that is now £122.5 million—that is not quite a reduction of the level that I thought I heard the hon. Lady describe, which was considerably higher. I emphasise, however, that councils have many more powers and the opportunity to recoup costs, and it matters that they use those powers if the issue is a local priority. However, the national Government cannot force councils to do so.

I encourage all councils to be alert to fly-tipping and to use their powers. When councils ask us for powers, we will try to ensure that they get those powers in the future. Councils currently have more than 20 powers to choose from to tackle fly-tipping, and we have recently spent time working in Committees to give them more. We have strengthened a council's ability to search and seize the vehicles of suspected fly-tippers, and we have introduced a fixed penalty notice for small-scale fly-tipping. An additional 20,000 fixed penalty notices were issued in 2016-17, but not all councils have decided to implement those powers. Again, I strongly encourage them to do so.

David T. C. Davies: Will my hon. Friend look at my suggestion to move some of the liability towards people who produce waste? Virtually every Member present agrees that whatever we are doing is not currently enough to deter people from committing this crime.

Dr Coffey: I heard what my hon. Friend said, and he will appreciate that this matter is devolved to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government have already carried out a consultation to make it easier for councils to fine

householders who do not check how their waste is disposed of, but those powers have not yet come into effect. We require a further consultation, because I am conscious that householders may not realise that websites are available—such as that of the Environment Agency—on which they can look up the names of the firms that come around touting for business. There is an obligation to use the appropriate procedures, because otherwise people can be convicted. Fixed penalty notices were introduced because they tend to be a more straightforward way for councils to deter people. Through this debate and other consultations, I am keen to continue to raise the awareness of householders who must look into who is disposing of their waste, and who it is being passed to. Our current assessment of fly-tipped waste in England is that two thirds of it comes from private households. That is why we are doing what I hope my hon. Friend believes we should be doing. I am happy to hear any more ideas he might have and to share them with the Welsh Government—I am sure he will also do that through his own political links.

Let me single out and praise certain councils across the country that are excelling. In Hertfordshire, for example, funding from the police and crime commissioner has enabled the county council to set up an effective partnership group that is starting to see results. Buckinghamshire County Council is another great example. It decided to make this issue a priority, and its dedicated enforcement strategy has halved fly-tipping incidents over the past 15 years—it is now prosecuting more than one case a week. In Cambridgeshire, a local council is making use of section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which requires landowners to clear waste when the amenity of an area is being significantly affected. That has helped to tackle fly-tipping hotspots, such as the front gardens and alleyways that become dumping grounds, as has been mentioned by many Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton. I appreciate that councils have to decide whether to invest resources in tackling this, but there are powers that they can use to great effect.

It is often asserted—several hon. Members mentioned this, including the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew)—that there is a connection between charging at household waste recycling centres and an increase in household waste being fly-tipped. There are anecdotal reports suggesting a connection, but the evidence remains inconclusive. The waste and resources action programme undertook a survey last year, but it did not show a strong link between the two issues. I am happy to write to hon. Members present and share that information with them. I know that there are calls for fly-tipped waste to be disposed of for free at household waste recycling centres. More generally, enabling waste tipped on private land to be disposed of free of charge would not provide the right incentive to deter fly-tipping or to secure land. I stress that it is up to councils to determine whether to charge, in line with legislation.

Neil Parish: The Minister makes an interesting point about landowners acting to stop fly-tipping, but we must be careful. If people have to put huge boulders, or all sorts of things, in gateways just to stop people getting in to fly-tip, that is unsightly. I do not want the onus to be put back on to the landowner and farmer. It is the wrong way to do things. We must concentrate on the people who have illegally tipped in the first place.

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend will be aware that much of the approach to tackling crime is to do with prevention. I understand what he said about the unsightly effects if we get landowners to try to reduce the opportunity for fly-tipping, but many people put extra locks and burglar alarms in their homes to deter people from targeting a particular home. That is an example of how people take an active interest in making their home robust against entry and crime. I understand my hon. Friend's point and do not blame landowners. I am trying to be helpful.

I recognise that more can be done. The Government are hosting a roundtable on fly-tipping on private land next week. We will consider further what we can do. A key point is knowing the scale of the issue. Currently we cannot quantify the extent of fly-tipping on private land, as there is no established easy way for people to report it. However, we are changing that. We are learning from Natural Resources Wales, which has created a mobile app to record incidents. We will shortly be rolling out a similar app for England, with many benefits. The app will link through to the local council so that its enforcement team will instantly know when an incident has been recorded. It will also automatically plot the incidents on a map so that hotspots can be targeted. Such sharing of information will help the police, in particular, to identify issues quickly.

In response to a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), I would point out that we have just concluded a consultation on giving local councils and the Environment Agency the power to issue a fixed penalty notice of up to £400 for householders who do not take reasonable measures to ensure that their waste is provided to an authorised person such as a local authority or registered waste carrier. People can check online. The consultation closed on 26 March and we are considering the responses to determine exactly what proof a householder would need to provide to show that they had complied with the regulations. I want to make it clear that the approach is not about duffing up victims, but there are laws in place and we need to try to ensure that people obey them, rather than taking shortcuts. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, we intend to lay regulations in the autumn.

As to the broader question of tackling more forms of waste crime, we brought in regulations in February to strengthen the Environment Agency's powers to tackle problem waste. It can lock site gates and require all the waste at a site to be cleared. We have just concluded a consultation on tightening the requirements to hold a waste permit and reviewing the waste exemption regime. As I have pointed out, there will be quite a lot more in our resources and waste strategy later in the year.

We will set out proposals to review the brokers and dealers regime. That is an important step to crack down on organised gangs who collect waste under the veil of legitimacy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) highlighted, there are a lot of cowboy operators. We will be working closely with the waste industry to determine how best to ensure that those who are part of the trade fully understand their duties and responsibilities.

Much has been said about sentencing and we are reviewing it so that people who fly-tip will be punished appropriately. In 2014 we worked with the Sentencing Council to strengthen the guideline for environmental offences. The level of fines for organisations found

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guilty of fly-tipping has since risen, but fines for individuals have not undergone the same increase. My officials are liaising with the Ministry of Justice on that matter.

I am interested in the idea about insurance that was raised during the debate, and will add it to my next roundtable with the Association of British Insurers. As to consistency of response, we can only do our best by trying to share best practice with councils and police, and that is what we shall continue to do; I assure hon. Members that we work with other Departments. The hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) highlighted action being taken by the Scottish Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) was right when she pointed out that there are not many prosecutions and that the fines that are given are quite low, and when she praised Angus Council for its work to ensure that recycling centres are open more widely. As to marine pollution, those things that blight the countryside and urban streets often also end up in the marine environment. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) mentioned illegal waste sites, and I assure him that we are taking action on those more broadly. The issue is less to do with fly-tipping than with the way people exceed their licences. We managed to get an extra £30 million out of the Treasury to support the Environment Agency in tackling that matter more, as we recognise the increasingly prevalent serious and organised crime links.

What I have been describing is a continuing journey, but I am pleased about the parliamentary support for more powers to be given to the Environment Agency and councils to tackle what is a real blight. I welcome the contributions that have been made to the debate today.

10.57 am

Neil Parish: I thank the Minister for summing up and for the work she is doing on the matter. It is not easy to control fly-tipping. There were 25 Members in the Chamber

at one stage in the debate, and that was after a late sitting last night, straight after a recess, which shows how important the subject is to many people. I thank everyone for their contributions to the debate, which was good-tempered and informative. We talked about making those who dispose of waste in the first place more responsible for their actions, for example through the DVLA, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies). There were points about keeping waste sites open for people to dispose of waste rather than fly-tipping it, and about putting the onus back on those who are caught by having heavier fines. We must remember that those who fly-tip need to be prosecuted. Otherwise, landowners and farmers have to clear up, and there are many costs that are often unrecoverable.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), made an interesting point about satellites. On the Select Committee I have learned that it is amazing what those satellites can pick up—from an electric fence to goodness knows what. If they can do that, why can they not pick up lorries and vans going into the countryside? That might give us a clue as to who the people are. It is interesting and probably worth pursuing. We need to do all we can and bring everyone together, from local authorities to Government, to crack down so that we can have a countryside that is beautiful. We talk about greater access to the countryside, and we need to sort this issue out, otherwise farmers and landowners will understandably be concerned. Will greater access mean greater opportunities for people to take rubbish out and tip it into fields in our great countryside?

I welcome the debate and all the Members who took part, including the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally), who had some good ideas from Scotland. We need to take all the ideas—I do not think that anyone has an instant panacea—and work together to reduce fly-tipping so that we have a greener, pleasant land.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Health Services in Essex

11 am

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered health services in Essex.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I am grateful to the Speaker for granting me this debate. I thank the Minister for his time, and I welcome him; I suspect that he may already be familiar not just with the great county of Essex but with many of the issues I will give an airing to. I am grateful for this debate and for the opportunity to raise a number of issues that I have discussed previously in the House relating to health services in Essex.

Before I go into the details of the way in which health services are working in my constituency and where improvements are needed, I pay tribute to the NHS staff who work tirelessly to save lives and help people to get better—not only my constituents but constituents across the county. I have naturally visited our local hospitals and general practitioner surgeries and had the privilege of joining our ambulance service at both its headquarters and its new base. I have been impressed with the staff I have met and I pay tribute to them. They have obviously had a great deal on with the winter pressures. I also pay tribute to the staff and leadership I have met in the local NHS, and to the Government for investing in our NHS.

I say that because, since I was elected in 2010, it is fair to say that we have had a number of issues. In that general election of 2010, the Labour party was talking about cuts to the NHS. Ever since then, it has sought to weaponise the NHS and to frighten and scare my constituents and the public about local service provision and the services available to them. The Conservatives in government have invested in the NHS, and the result, in Essex, is more patients being treated by more doctors and nurses.

I welcome in particular the recent announcement, of which the Minister will be aware, of investment in Anglia Ruskin University's school of medicine, which will provide training places for 100 more people. My fellow Essex MPs, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), and I made strong representations in support of the university's bid.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in praising the new school of medicine to train the next generation of doctors in Chelmsford. I heard from the vice-chancellor last week that more than 400 people have already applied to be among that first intake of 100. Does she agree that investing in the next generation of doctors, especially GPs, is crucial to delivering better health services in the future, and that giving our bright young Essex kids that opportunity is key?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to the primary care side and GPs, because we face strong pressures on GPs, especially in relation to succession planning.

I also welcome the new investment to support the transformation and improvement of hospital services, including £69 million to support the Colchester and Ipswich

merger. The NHS in Essex has also done remarkably well in cutting enormous swathes of bureaucracy. When I first spoke in Parliament about the NHS, I highlighted the enormous growth in the number of bureaucrats and managers in the primary care trusts and strategic health authorities under Labour, which took precious resources away from the frontlines. We need only go back to some of the records and even some of my own comments in this House to see the horrific numbers. Hundreds of millions of pounds were spent just on recruiting managers. We should be pleased that that bureaucracy has now been cut out, but there are challenges in the NHS that need addressing.

My constituency is served by two clinical commissioning groups, Mid Essex and North East Essex. The two hospital trusts are Mid Essex, which runs Broomfield, and the Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust, which is about to merge with Ipswich. The recently established Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health services, and we have the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, which has also seen enormous change over the last seven to eight years.

Representing a constituency in the east of England, my hon. Friend the Minister will be familiar with some of those challenges. My constituency does not have a hospital of its own, but he will be relieved to hear that I am one Member of Parliament who is not calling for a hospital in my constituency. Colchester general hospital provides acute services to residents in the north-eastern part of the Witham constituency, and Broomfield hospital in Chelmsford provides acute services to residents in the rest of the constituency. Some services are provided in Braintree community hospital, but in Witham town itself and the whole constituency there is no NHS hospital and no significant out-patient service, just GP practices.

My part of Essex received no significant investment under Labour—a point worth labouring, particularly in light of the points I made earlier on. We now need new investment to meet the growing demand brought by a population increasing in age and in numbers. The area I represent is increasing in population and, in terms of demographics, the proportion of the population aged over 60 is increasing and the number aged over 85 will double. Across Essex as a whole, the proportion of residents aged over 65 is now 21%, higher than the 16% national average, which naturally adds pressures to health and social care services.

The three local planning authorities that cover parts of the constituency are Braintree District Council, Maldon District Council and Colchester Borough Council. Local plans adopted by those councils or going through public examination could add a total of at least 37,000 new dwellings by the early 2030s. In Witham town the population of 26,000 is set to grow by 20% over the next 20 years, and sites have rightly been identified in the town that will accommodate more than 2,000 dwellings, but the increases in population seen in recent years have not been matched by proportionate increases in the health economy. As a result, there are naturally strains on primary care.

Branch surgeries in Tolleshunt D'Arcy and Birch have closed. In both instances, leases on premises were expiring and, even though the local community proposed alternative options to maintain some GP coverage in

[Priti Patel]

those villages, a solution could not be arranged. Notification of closure plans was made fairly late, which limited the time available to find a solution. I encourage the Minister to review how branch closures are managed and to ensure that sufficient time and effort is put into finding alternative facilities to provide a regular GP presence, particularly in rural locations.

The Sidney House Surgery in Hatfield Peverel is one the Minister may know about, since we have corresponded over it. It is full and over-subscribed, yet as new development is planned for the village the NHS simply asks for a sum of money for capital improvements based on a mathematical formula, which has no regard for the real costs involved in upgrading GP services to meet demand. Ultimately, that means that developer contributions will either be used elsewhere in the NHS or not used at all and returned.

In Tiptree, a growing village that the Minister may know of because it is where the world-famous Wilkin & Sons is based, we can see what happens when housing growth is simply not matched by new GP provision. The ratio of patients to GPs is over 3,500:1, which leads to severe difficulties with patients waiting for appointments. In fact, not a day goes past when I am not contacted by a constituent in that village highlighting some of the pressures on waiting times and the difficulty in making appointments.

I hope that the Minister will consider how the NHS can secure developer contributions that genuinely reflect the costs involved in delivering new GP provisions that are relative to local needs. This is a really important point. We are not against growth in our villages—we understand that they need to grow—but it increases pressures, and our GPs and local surgeries must be supported in planning that growth in this part of Essex with existing communities, because they need to be confident that investment will be provided to ease the pressures that they experience.

We also need to see action on expanding hours so that people can access GP services, and on reducing the number of vacant GP posts in the county. That is why a new university is vital; it will help in securing and training GPs to fill those vital posts—succession planning, as I like to call it.

With the Witham constituency, and indeed Chelmsford, being part of the London commuter belt, it is difficult for people who work or who have caring commitments to children or elderly relatives to make GP appointments for early on in the day. New investment to support longer GP hours and seven-day access would be welcome, including more primary care access funding. This part of Essex is always open to any new pilots or initiatives to deliver the Government's ambitions on improved GP access.

I am sure that the Minister has heard of my campaign for a new multi-purpose healthcare centre to be built in Witham town. I have already mentioned that Witham is a growing town. It is a great place to live and a fantastic place for many of the new housing developments that we are seeing. It is a commuter town. New healthcare services, including primary care, are vital. A new facility would ease burdens, which we of course want—particularly with the population growth that we are seeing.

The national average ratio of patients to GPs is around 1,700:1. The average in mid Essex is around 1,800. In Witham town, we have four surgeries and more than 30,000 registered patients covered by only 13 full-time equivalent GPs. That gives a ratio of 2,300—a third higher than the national average. The pressures are pretty stark and clear, and residents who are seeing new homes built obviously want to see this new centre built.

Our district council is being supportive and making funding available. Mid Essex CCG has put resources in place to develop a business case, and to its credit is working with me and all stakeholders to deliver the centre. We are now at the final hurdle. We want to get all GPs on side and ensure that they are all signed up so that we can get bricks on the ground. It would be helpful if the Minister and the Government backed the project, which would also give all local GPs the confidence to sign up to the healthcare centre.

I will quickly raise two other issues. First, on mental health services, the Minister will be aware of the situation with Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, which was established last year from a merger of two separate mental health trusts covering north and south Essex. Some legacy issues have recently been well documented in the media, but I have a constituent, Mrs Melanie Leahy, who lost her son, Matthew, in the most tragic circumstances while he was being treated by the trust. I have raised this case over a number of years, and the Government will know all the background to it. Police inquiries are being made into his death and into several other deaths as well. I urge the Minister to keep the historical cases under review, so that affected families are supported, we learn from past mistakes and robust action takes place where there has been neglect.

Winter led to unprecedented demands on the East of England Ambulance Service. Five years ago the trust suffered from poor leadership, but I pay tribute to everybody in the ambulance trust. It has been an absolute privilege to meet the paramedics in Witham and on the frontline who every day do amazing and brilliant work. The events of the winter remind us that the pressures are severe. The county council has helped with reducing pressures on social care and getting people out of hospitals and living independently back at home. I would welcome some words from the Minister on the action that the Department is taking to support our quite remarkable East of England Ambulance Trust to improve preparations for future winters and to give it the support that it needs.

Finally, although reforms, working practices and innovation have really helped to reduce pressures in the NHS, it is fair to say that, when it comes to funding, Essex has been historically underfunded compared with other parts of the country, which is down to challenging and changing funding formulae. I welcome the great deal of work undertaken by the Department of Health and Ministers to review funding, but I want to see more support, more reform and more investment in greater performance. Better performance should be rewarded through investment. I hope that the Department and the Minister will work with me to secure local funding and to secure a new facility in Witham. I thank the Minister for the time and attention he has given to discussing healthcare in Essex.

11.15 am

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Howarth. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing the debate and on her wider commitment to championing Witham and the health issues within her constituency, particularly her work on the health centre in Witham. I am pleased that she is not calling for a new hospital in the constituency, but she is absolutely right to highlight the changing demographics within her constituency—in particular, a growing elderly population—and how that requires local health services to adapt. As both an east of England MP and an MP representing a rural constituency, I recognise many of the issues to which she referred.

I thank my right hon. Friend for acknowledging the additional medical places to train the next generation of Essex doctors. Our hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) rightly spoke about local demand for the places: there have been 400 applicants already, which signals why it was the right decision to place a medical school in Chelmsford and how important it will be to meeting the health needs of patients in the Essex area.

My right hon. Friend was also right to highlight the importance of developer contributions. As the Government meet the challenge set by the Prime Minister to increase the amount of housing, it is right that developers contribute to meeting health needs. Following a constituency case of my own that brought this issue to light, I commissioned a paper in the Department to ensure that we look again at how NHS England and CCGs secure the right contribution from developers into local health services. My right hon. Friend also mentioned a specific constituency case. I absolutely agree that we need to learn from past issues where they arise. As she will know, the Secretary of State has given great leadership on patient safety. It is something that he has personally challenged within the NHS family, and he is rightly putting it at the heart of the Government's agenda.

My right hon. Friend also mentioned the ambulance trust. A huge amount of work has gone on to support the East of England Ambulance Trust after issues were raised by a number of our colleagues over the Christmas period, including by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). Members from all parts of the House will wish him a speedy recovery from his recent minor stroke. He held an Adjournment debate on the East of England Ambulance Service and raised issues that we have been addressing, including the risk summit, which I know is a priority for NHS England and NHS Improvement. I have met ambulance bosses, and my own constituency is served by the East of England Ambulance Service. It is right to put on the record that, under this Government, there has been a 30% increase in the number of paramedics, which signals the commitment that we have made to the ambulance service. However, it is also right that we look at issues such as the handover of ambulances and how we get that process working better.

I thank my right hon. Friend for her support for the Witham primary care centre, which will strengthen Witham's primary care services. I understand that site options appraisals have been completed and agreed by the Mid Essex CCG, and discussions are ongoing with the developer and local practices to secure agreement. The CCG is hoping to finalise the business case by the end of June,

although I understand that it is subject to final agreement by the local practices involved. She is absolutely right that local practices need to recognise the way that the constituency and Witham are developing and to adapt with that development in order to meet the growing needs of the town.

The health hub will offer primary care services, community health provision and elective care activity, replacing the majority of current GP facilities in Witham. The hub will use a greater skills mix, which has been identified as key to releasing capacity in general practice. The Government are committed to recruiting more GPs, but we are also looking at the skills mix that supports GPs—those who work with GPs—so that we address the way patients now present. They often present with a number of conditions, which requires a multitude of support and intervention. What matters, therefore, is the recruitment not just of GPs, but of physician assistants, the wider nursing team and the other support alongside GPs that is part of addressing the health needs of constituents in Witham and elsewhere. That is at the heart of what I understand is my right hon. Friend's vision for the health centre, and is exactly where the Government are trying to take primary care—offering a broader suite of support and services to patients, who, as I said, often present with more than one condition. That requires a wider team.

I understand that the Sidney House and The Laurels practice has expressed a desire to be operationally involved in the scheme, although that option has yet to be fully explored. Funding support has been made available for the Sidney House and The Laurels practice, through the Mid Essex CCG's primary care sustainability fund, to go towards the cost of additional staff to alleviate pressures. That funding is assisting the practice with a range of initiatives: training clinical staff, increasing the number of clinical staff and providing an additional 20 hours a week of administrative support. That additional support should enable the practice to increase capacity and access for patients. I understand that the new triage appointment system introduced at the practice has been well received by patients and is helping the practice to manage demand. That funding will continue, alongside more funding made available by the CCG through the recently established Primary Care Foundations programme. Mid Essex CCG is also supporting work across mid-Essex to alleviate pressures. That includes the roll-out of decision-making software designed to remove blockages in GP practices' workflow.

My right hon. Friend raised the issue of GP access more widely in her constituency. We recognise that an ageing population and more people living with long-term conditions mean that primary care is under more pressure than ever, and we are taking steps to address that. That includes the additional funding to which my right hon. Friend referred. Funding will increase by £2.4 billion by 2020-21, going from £9.6 billion in 2015-16 to more than £12 billion by 2020-21. That is a 14% increase in real terms, which has been put in place by this Government. We have announced our ambition to expand the medical workforce, with an extra 5,000 full-time equivalent doctors working in general practice by 2020 as part of a wider increase to the total workforce in general practice of 10,000. We recognise that that is an ambitious target of double the growth of previous years, but it shows the commitment of this Government to our NHS.

[Stephen Barclay]

As both my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford and my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham said, Anglia Ruskin University's new school of medicine will have 100 publicly funded student places following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 20 March. The £20 million school of medicine, currently being built on the Chelmsford campus, is the first in Essex. It not only is a physical representation of the effective lobbying by my right hon. Friend, my hon. Friend and other colleagues from across Essex and the east of England, but shows the physical commitment of this Government to addressing the health needs of constituents in Essex. The building, which is nearing completion, will feature state-of-the-art skills facilities, specialist teaching space, a lecture theatre and an anatomy suite.

Nationally, Health Education England has made 3,250 places in GP specialty training available per year since 2016. A suite of measures is being taken to assist primary care, sitting alongside the work my right hon. Friend has spoken about. I am talking about how we look at the health estate, how we bring services together and how we do that in a hub that adapts to the changing needs of communities such as the ones that she represents. Nationally, 52% of the population are benefiting from extended access to general practice, including evening and weekend appointments. That reflects the fact that many people in Witham and across Essex work and want greater flexibility of access to primary care. In the old model, people might be at home during the day and have time to go to the GP; today, people need a service that is adapting to the current workplace and the way families live and wish to access primary care.

The "General Practice Forward View" committed to investing £45 million in a national programme, to run over three years, to stimulate uptake of online consultations

systems for every practice, and taking actions to support practices to offer patients more online self-care and self-management services. The issue is not just the hours of access to primary care, but the channel of access. That may be through the improvements in clinical service offered through the 111 helpline—the doubling of the number of clinicians answering those calls—but it is also about primary care having different ways of serving their constituencies through online platforms.

NHS England and Health Education England are working together to boost recruitment, to address the reasons why GPs are leaving the profession and to encourage GPs to return to practice. Furthermore, the Government have committed to developing the wider primary care workforce and supporting improved access in terms of both GP numbers and how patients can access those services. In Essex, the Witham primary care hub is expanding access within the community for patients, integrating care within the community setting, and the Sidney House and The Laurels practice is using CCG funding to improve its primary care appointments system and its IT.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham for raising these issues. She is absolutely right to recognise that, as Witham grows and its health needs evolve, it is important that primary care in the town adapts to the changes in her constituency. In putting these issues on the record today, she has signalled the importance of that to Witham, and how the investment that this Government are making in medical school places at Chelmsford, in primary care nationally and in the ambulance service is addressing the needs that she has articulated today.

Question put and agreed to.

11.26 am

Sitting suspended.

Leaving the EU: Tourism and the Creative Industries

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the UK leaving the EU on tourism and the creative industries.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, and to have the opportunity to debate the effect that Brexit could have on tourism and the creative industries in the UK. These are two vital and vibrant sectors of our economy, which I believe have largely been overlooked and underestimated in the Brexit debate. Their annual contribution to our economy needs to be acknowledged and protected. If Brexit goes ahead—I believe it is an “if”—these sectors will need special measures to prevent jobs from being lost and income draining from the economy.

It is no exaggeration to say that tourism and the creative industries are linchpins of our economy, which we cannot allow to be sacrificed on the Brexit altar of Conservative party self-preservation. Many of the millions of jobs and livelihoods that these industries support could be lost if we do not stop this dangerous economic self-harm. While they are significant separately, they also come together in some of our most iconic popular and cultural events, such as Glastonbury, the Proms and—for me, in my constituency, the most significant example—the Edinburgh International Festival and its Fringe. The Edinburgh festival is the biggest and most successful event of its type in the world, and has experienced seven decades of success—unending, growing success. It is a fantastic and awe-inspiring month-long festival of music, theatre, arts, books, comedy, street performers and now politics, but even it will not be immune to the threat posed by Brexit. You do not have to take my word for it, Mr Bone. The director of Festivals Edinburgh, which leads efforts to promote the city’s flagship events around the world, has said:

“There is a sense of threat and risk and making sure that Brexit doesn’t put us in a worse position.”

There are plenty of figures that illustrate the argument for both industries needing protection, but I will look first at tourism. Tourism encompasses about 250,000 small and medium-sized enterprises across the UK, and its growth is on a par with that of our digital industries. It supports approximately 3 million jobs, which are spread across every single local authority in Britain; this is not a problem that affects only one part of the country. Tourism brings in about £127 billion a year to the UK—9% of GDP. Around 37 million visitors come here every year, and in 2016 almost 70% of those visitors and 44% of what they spent came from other EU countries. Eight of our top 10 in-bound tourist markets are other EU states. Those visitors may now think twice about coming here. The UK’s tourism earnings from Europe will not be easily replaced by other markets, such as the USA and China, which require long-haul journeys and are much more difficult to access. In my own city of Edinburgh, almost 2 million international visitors spend £822 million a year—the figures are quite staggering. It is clear that if tourism begins to fail, or the industry begins to shrink, many areas, particularly

our rural communities and parts of Scotland, will suffer badly. As I pointed out, jobs in every area of the country will be under threat.

There is a clear link to the hospitality industry and attractions, where, coincidentally, 50% of the workforce in Edinburgh come from other EU member countries. Those workers are now worried about their ability to stay and work in this country. The ripples of a decline in visitor numbers will reach far into other sectors of the economy—for example, aviation.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. As a remain voter, I am sympathetic to her position, but does she agree that sometimes one of the main drivers of tourism is the exchange rate, and one thing we have seen is increased tourism as a result of decreased value of the pound against the euro and other currencies, perhaps as a direct consequence of that Brexit vote? I know she will go on to develop this point, but does she also agree that the main concern is the workforce in the tourism industry—that so many workers in tourism are from Europe and overseas—and that, as in agriculture, that is a big problem that needs to be considered by the Government?

Christine Jardine: I do not agree that the decline in the value of the pound solves the problem, because it creates other problems elsewhere in the industry, as it suffered its biggest slump since the devaluation under Harold Wilson. However, I do agree that our main problem in this industry will be the workforce and how we will replace the workers who in parts of the country outside Edinburgh make up 20% of the workforce, but in Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland make up almost 50%.

Aviation is one of the UK’s success stories and supports 500,000 jobs in the tourism industry. The current ease of transit to and from the EU enables tourism to contribute £500 million a week to the economy, but 85% of the UK’s air traffic is through our EU membership.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): On the first point, I think we are seeing record levels of tourism in this country, because the pound has dropped—I think that is more or less indisputable. On the aviation point, does the hon. Lady agree that abolishing air passenger duty would give a bigger boost to the UK economy with no cost? A number of studies show that if air passenger duty were abolished, Treasury income from other sources, because of increased economic activity, would benefit the UK as a whole.

Christine Jardine: While air passenger duty might have an economic impact, it cannot overcome the biggest single problem: it will not allow planes to take off. We need a deal on coming out of the EU that will allow our flights to continue to take off and land in Europe, and travel across Europe with the same ease that they do today.

For the creative industries, the figures are, if anything, even more impressive: these industries are worth an estimated £90 billion to the economy and account for one in every 11 jobs. That is something we often overlook. Those jobs are in fashion design, video games, television, theatre, furniture design, radio and many other sectors. International broadcasters alone invest more than £1 billion

[Christine Jardine]

a year in Britain. It is our fastest growing sector and the UK is currently a world leader in the field, with creative exports from Stormzy and Shakespeare to “The Great British Bake Off”, which define what the UK is to visitors we want to attract from across the globe.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of what the hon. Lady just listed and the importance of the creative industries to our wider economy, does she think it will be pertinent for the Government to appoint officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to the Department for Exiting the European Union?

Christine Jardine: That is not a point that I had previously considered, but I think it is well made. Perhaps that would help to alleviate the problems those industries might face and actually draw attention to some of them.

As I said, international broadcasters contribute about £1 billion to the economy. All of that economic strength—jobs, growth and potential—is undermined by Brexit. If our creative industries are not protected, world-class events such as the Edinburgh festival, Glastonbury and many others, will find that for musicians and artists who used to tour Europe freely, with no issues over EU crew, equipment licences or visas, the whole process will become slower, more expensive and in some cases not possible at all. Fashion, lighting and furniture designers will lose the benefits of cross-EU design rights. The video games, advertising, publishing, television and film sectors will lose access to the talent that is their lifeblood. Funding from Creative Europe is at risk.

If the UK’s creative industries are threatened, there will be an impact on tourism. As I said, the Edinburgh International Festival is the biggest event of its kind in the world. To put it into context, if we imagine the FIFA World cup coming to the UK every summer, we begin to understand the value and impact on the country’s economy that the Edinburgh festival has. In 2016 it was estimated that festival audiences accounting for around 4.5 million ticket sales generated £300 million for the economy, and that is not unusual.

The festival is the biggest, most high profile and most diverse in its scale and scope, with everything from street theatre to major orchestral concerts. Because of that, it offers a unique insight into why organisations representing our musicians, hotels, venues and performers are campaigning hard for protection against the potential damage of Brexit. The festival is regarded as one of the most important cultural events in the world. The Fringe in its own right is the world’s largest arts event, and there are affiliated events in film, art, books, science and television. Together they guarantee that throughout the summer my city is awash with tourists, often visiting the festival as a gateway to the rest of Scotland and the UK. Only the Olympics and the FIFA World cup are bigger attractions.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on an excellent speech. Does she agree that sharing art, music, sport and culture enriches people’s lives and our communities? In St Helens, we have had a twinning arrangement with Stuttgart for 70 years. We are

very proud that people from there come to visit us, we visit them and we work together. Brexit should not put any of that in jeopardy. It is important we work together to ensure those partnerships endure.

Christine Jardine: I absolutely agree. The value of the creative industries to our economy is not simply in the money they bring in; it is in creating our culture and events for young people to enjoy, as well as bringing tourists to the country and maintaining that industry. The problem we face is that people might opt to take up opportunities on the continent or elsewhere after Brexit.

Music development organisations and other cultural groups might also find themselves without funding streams. That is the immediate effect, but collateral damage could be seen in other industries if the creative industries and tourism cease to be the cash cows the economy has come to depend on. Without freedom of movement, many of those who take part in these festivals may not wish, or be able, to stay. It is absolutely clear that if we are to protect those areas, which are central to not just our economy but our social and cultural wellbeing, our creative industries need changes now.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Lady makes a very good point about those working in the creative industries. Does she agree that without the right to work being protected, organisations such as Scottish Ballet in my constituency, which has a large international ensemble currently touring Scotland with the wonderful “Highland Fling”, might not be able to continue to attract the audiences it has or the talent it needs to put on such big performances?

Christine Jardine: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. It would not be stretching the point too far to say that not only Scottish Ballet, but Scottish Opera and every single arts event staged at the Edinburgh International Festival and other festivals in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK may face that problem.

The hon. Lady is from Glasgow. It is interesting to consider whether Glasgow would have benefited from the cultural renaissance that it has since 1990 if it had not been able to host the capital of culture that year. I was brought up in Glasgow. The difference that that single year of cultural events and the gathering of the creative industries in the city made cannot be overestimated.

We need to look hard at what the industries are asking for. Measures such as touring passports for musicians, special equipment licences and support for arts development are all ways that they can be helped. The creative industries must be at the top table. The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) suggested that they should be represented in the Brexit Department. Indeed, they should. Membership of Creative Europe and Erasmus must be maintained, and the UK Government must agree to replace EU funding sources. Access to talent must be protected, touring performers must have a single EU-wide work permit, and mutual recognition of qualifications must be protected—the list is long.

There is a much simpler way of protecting not just the creative industries and tourism but every single industry in this country: taking the first opportunity we have to rethink the Brexit position completely. We must consider whether it is in fact better for all our industries for us to take an exit from Brexit and to allow the

British people to decide whether it is what they actually want. The control that they desired might give them the opportunity to say, “Yes, we want to stay within the European Union.”

2.45 pm

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): It is a great pleasure to appear under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this important debate. Let me begin by echoing what she said about the Edinburgh International Festival: it is indeed the world’s largest festival of its kind, and the oldest. It is incumbent on us to remember that it was started just after the war, at a time of austerity. It is worth recalling that throughout our recent history we have invested in the arts, even at the most difficult times.

This debate gives us the opportunity to put on record how important the creative industries are to the whole of the UK economy and to raise issues as we approach Brexit. Much as I would love to reverse Brexit, I am not sure that I can agree with the hon. Lady that that is a likely outcome. We sad remainers are now focused—I certainly am—on making the best we can of a very unfortunate situation.

As a former Minister with responsibility for the creative industries, may I take this opportunity to welcome the current Minister to his position? I think that this is the first debate I have taken part in where he has been in his role. I can tell him privately, because I know that no one watches proceedings in Parliament, that he is already extremely popular because of how he has hit the ground running. It has been a great pleasure to me to see the importance of the creative industries rise up the policy agenda.

The creative industries were, in effect, put together by Chris Smith in 1997 when he became the Culture Secretary. He was the first to define what is quite a disparate sector, ranging from architecture to fashion, television and film, and to start to show the huge impact it has on every aspect of our lives. I am glad that under the previous Government we made great strides in supporting the creative industries. Some of that was basic policy infrastructure, such as the creation of the Creative Industries Council, which brought together the Departments responsible for business and for culture with the creative industries to look at policies. I am very pleased to say that it has been carried on by the current Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy with the publication of an industrial strategy for the creative industries.

The introduction of tax breaks for many of the creative industries has had a huge impact on their contribution to the economy. I was struck by statistical analysis showing that the service economy contributed the most to our economic growth in a recent quarter—I cannot remember which quarter it was, but it was two or three quarters ago—and that the second biggest contributor from the service economy was the film industry. The film tax break now sees something like £1 billion of investment coming into the UK.

It was always my mission—I am glad to say that I succeeded, although I did not meet too much resistance—to persuade the then Prime Minister and the then Chancellor to visit a film set occasionally as well as a factory.

That recorded the fact that film sets often contribute a significant amount to our economy. We have seen studios and employment grow, and that tax break ecology has now been extended to video games, visual effects and animation, as well as the arts, through theatres, orchestras and exhibitions. It has made a real impact.

I was privileged recently to attend the opening of a new animation company in London, Locksmith Animation, which has been started by two distinguished people from the film industry, Sarah Smith and Julie Lockhart. Using the latest technology, the company has the potential to rival Pixar. No one can be in any doubt about the contribution of the creative industries to our economy.

Graham Stringer: I am following the right hon. Gentleman’s speech closely. I do not share his pessimism about the impact of Brexit on the creative industries. Sometime in the early 1980s, the number of people employed in the creative industries in Manchester and Lancashire surpassed the number of people employed in the traditional cotton industry, so it is an important economic generator in the north-west. As the former Minister, does he agree that this country does not invest in the creative industries in a fair way when it comes to the regions? Far too much goes to London.

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. When I was the Minister, I was struck by how regionally diverse the creative industries were, particularly the video games industry. There are companies engaged in that pursuit in Leamington Spa, Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle. It is a challenge. Sometimes it is straightforward economics: people want to base themselves in London to have access to the widest possible range of services, but it is incumbent on us—I am sure the Minister will respond to this—to recognise the diversity and talent in our regions. The recent merger of Tech North with Tech City UK has created a UK-wide tech quango, which is focused on highlighting tech success stories across the country. Different parts of the country have different specialisms in tech—I am moving slightly away from the creative industries.

The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) makes a valuable point, and the same criticism is often levelled at cultural funding. I am chairman of Creative Fuse North East, a project led by Newcastle University, which analyses the symbiosis between tech and culture. It is important to remember that culture is often a generator for success in the creative industries, so we must maintain a strong focus on investing in culture outside London. I am glad that the Arts Council has made great strides in doing that in recent years. We are very successful, and the creatives industries are now high on the policy agenda. I should give credit to the Creative Industries Federation, which was created two or three years ago to lobby on their behalf.

Tourism is a hugely important industry—the fourth or fifth most important in our country—that depends to a great extent on culture and heritage. By investing in and supporting culture and heritage, the Government support our tourism industry. We launched the tourism strategy in 2010, when the then Prime Minister gave a speech supporting tourism. One of my great bugbears is that far too few Prime Ministers—that is, none—ever make speeches about the arts. I hope that the Minister

[Mr Vaizey]

will continue to press the case to our Prime Minister that she should give a speech about the importance of culture and the arts in this country.

Despite the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton trying to cheer me up, I am thoroughly depressed about Brexit. The small silver lining, which is worth recalling, is that our biggest export partner outside the EU is the USA, with whom we do not have a trade deal. A lot of that export investment depends on the creative industries, such as the film industry and the video games industry. Many of those creative industries are global service industries that will not necessarily be hugely affected by Brexit, such as advertising, architecture and publishing, where we lead the world. It is incumbent on us—including depressed remainers—to continue to beat the drum for the global success of the UK's creative industries.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is very much missed from his former role, but during that time we had many discussions about the difficulties that artists, and musicians in particular, have in getting visas for the US. Does he share my concern that after Brexit they will have similar problems across Europe? What can we do to ensure that does not happen?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, I do share the hon. Lady's concern, but I must correct her: I do not think I am missed, because the new Minister is doing such an incredible job that he has wholly erased the memory of me. That is slightly irritating, but I am pleased that somebody as talented as him has taken on the role.

That concern goes both ways. The hon. Lady is incredibly perceptive, and I have worked with her very happily on many different issues. Talent is at the core of the success of our creative industries. If someone walks into the office of any successful business in any part of the country, they will hear a smorgasbord of different voices and meet people of a range of nationalities who have all been attracted by the success of the UK's creative industries.

We simply cannot have a situation in which we make it as difficult as possible for talented people with the right skills to come to this country, and we must not find ourselves in a situation in which it is difficult for our successful companies to send their people abroad, whether that is a band of musicians or a team of people from an advertising or architecture firm. That must be at the front and centre of the Government's thinking.

I was struck by an email I received today from a constituent, which is slightly tangential to the core subject of the debate. He runs a Brazilian management consultancy, which has an office in London because it believes in the openness of the UK economy. He cannot get a particular person with a speciality that would enhance the London business over from Brazil, and he has been trying for 12 months. It is a pathetic situation when the Home Office makes it so difficult for skilled people to come to this country and boost our economy.

The Minister should also keep an eye on the audiovisual media services directive. One of the UK's success stories is that we have hundreds, if not thousands, of broadcasters based here, which can be regulated by Ofcom, the best

communications regulator in Europe, and, as a result, transmit their services across Europe. As I was watching my BT Sport app in Europe last week, I was struck that, sadly, we cannot continue to take advantage of the digital single market, which allows portability for paid content. We will have to see what happens with that, but it is absolutely crucial.

The final hurdle—hon. Members will be pleased to know that I am coming to an end—is the French. They have carved culture out of every third-party free trade agreement between the EU and other countries. That was their No. 1 priority when the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was negotiated. As sure as oeuufs is oeuufs, the French will try to carve out culture in any free trade agreement between the UK and the European Union, and Ministers will have to be vigilant about the impact of any French agenda on the future of our creative industries.

2.57 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Bone, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey). He and I are veterans of long standing of such debates, and we still bear the scars of the Digital Economy Act 2017, in which we both took a great interest. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this important debate. I was intrigued to see how she would combine tourism and the creative industries, but she did it in such an elegant way that we can all forgive her for bringing together those awkward-sitting issues.

I will confine my remarks to the creative industries. I want to be as blunt as I can. Leaving the European Union will be an absolute and utter disaster for our creative industries. We cannot start to comprehend the predicament that we will soon find ourselves in. The sharing, collaboration and enjoyment of creativity is practically the antithesis of the central tenets of withdrawal, isolationism and the ending of free movement that are at the heart of the Government's Brexit.

The creative industries are quite particular—they are industries like no other—because they are fired by imagination, talent, creativity and invention. They exist to be appreciated, enjoyed and transferred across audiences worldwide without regard to border or territory. For success, they require the maximum conditions for international exchange and co-operation, which will allow them to develop and continue to thrive.

When it comes to supporting creative endeavour, our job as legislators is simple; indeed, it is only one thing. It is to try to create the maximal and optimal conditions for creativity to continue to develop, thrive and succeed. Pursuing Brexit is almost the opposite of that objective and that endeavour.

Let us just have a little, casual look at what is at risk here. The hon. Member for Edinburgh West said it—£92 billion is now generated by the creative industries for the UK economy. That is more than the automotive, life sciences, aerospace, and oil and gas industries combined. The creative industries are perhaps the fastest growing sector of our economy and I always like to say that these industries, and the growth we see from them, are like growing our economy on the imagination, the invention and the creativity of the British people.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Is it not the case that the UK is a world leader in intellectual property and will remain so after Brexit? If we choose to, we can join the European Patent Organisation, which already has non-EU countries as members.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning that point, and I will come on to discuss it, because I chair the all-party parliamentary group on intellectual property and I have a few choice words to say about where we are going with all this.

I want to say first, however, because it is important, that we are in the top three of all recognised sectors worldwide when it comes to the creative economy and creative industries. The hon. Lady is right that that has been achieved because we have a huge reservoir of talent and ability in these islands. However, we are not unique in that respect; the UK is not exceptional in having large swathes of talent. Lots of other nations have that, too, but we have harnessed that creativity, to ensure that it is supported, developed and allowed to thrive. We have created the conditions that have allowed creative endeavour to succeed.

As the hon. Lady suggested, one of those conditions is the environment that we have created. We have intellectual property arrangements, ensuring that copyright is protected and that our artists are able to secure a return for their endeavour, their ingenuity and their ability. We have created an effective business and support environment that has allowed our artists to develop and flourish. We have innovated, we have developed international relationships, we have collaborated and we have recognised and valued the international dimension of creativity. Brexit? It could make you cry, with the damage that it will do to all that.

The creative sector is very concerned about the impact of Brexit on our creative economy. The Creative Industries Federation has found that 96%—I repeat, 96%—of its members believe that Brexit is a fundamentally bad thing that will critically impact on the sector.

I listened to the Prime Minister's Mansion House speech. There were lots and lots of things that I deplored in what she said, but the thing that sickened me most was the casual way she dismissed the digital single market, as if it was some sort of Brussels wheeze that got in the way of our national liberation. The digital single market is all about harmonising arrangements across the European Union. As the largest creator of content in the whole of the European Union, we designed the digital single market for goodness' sake, and now we are joyfully leaving it. We will now be a third party when it comes to European arrangements, which is a profoundly bad position to be in, and we will not be looked at favourably by a European Union that we have so recently rejected.

Already, European nations are rubbing their hands and carving up all the institutions that they will acquire. The French are at it; the Germans are at it; and the eastern Europeans are practically gleeful about the opportunities that their content markets will now have, because we are leaving the European Union.

However, the biggest issue and the biggest threat that this ridiculous, chaotic Brexit will pose for our creative industries is the ending of freedom of movement. The creative industries probably need freedom of movement

more than any other sector within our economy; the Department for Exiting the European Union itself found that, when it looked at all this sort of thing. For investment, harmonisation and collaboration in developing markets, we require the type of arrangements that exist within the EU, and to casually walk away as if the digital single market did not matter a fig is something that we should be appallingly ashamed at.

I believe there is only one thing we can do. We will never get back to the optimal arrangements of the European Union, of the digital single market, of harmonising across Europe and creating the conditions in which our creative industries can develop, thrive and grow markets. But what we have to do, Minister, is to stay as closely aligned as possible to the European Union. Even though we are now a third party, and it is likely that we will be rejected and treated poorly, the Minister must ensure that whatever the EU does in the digital single market is replicated within the United Kingdom, because if he does not, we will be in some serious trouble.

The Minister must also ensure that the creative industries and intellectual property are at the heart of any bilateral trade arrangement that is put in place. As I said, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on intellectual property and I have seen the report from the Alliance for Intellectual Property that warns, once again, of a "cliff-edge" Brexit and the impact that it would have on IP rights, reciprocity and all the things to do with our audio-visual sector, with portability and all the good things that we have been able to secure. We will lose all that. It is not going to come back, but we have to make sure that we are properly aligned.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I want to put a question to the hon. Gentleman, not on IP but in his capacity as a well-known musician. Here, I am not talking about Runrig or Big Country, but—obviously—MP4. As a musician, he will probably know that only 2% of the music industry workforce has said that it feels Brexit will have a positive impact on their chances of work; 50% feared that it would have a negative impact. Does he agree that the Government should listen to their concerns and consider seeking a live music touring passport, which is one of several measures being discussed by the industry?

Pete Wishart: What we are now in the business of doing is finding solutions to mitigate the damage. The Minister will have to try and find ways to mitigate the loss of the optimal arrangements that we have in place now as members of the European Union. The touring passport is an example of how we can mitigate it. We are not going to get back to the ideal conditions. They have gone; for some reason, this Government are determined to pull us out of what is working for us, and is fundamentally and profoundly good for this sector. So arrangements will have to be put in place.

The hon. Lady will have seen the reports from UK Music, the Musicians' Union and the Performers' Alliance, which are all telling us that we are now in the position of trying to redress some of the damage.

Kerry McCarthy: What is important to consider when it comes to musicians and other creatives is that not everyone is from a huge money-making enterprise that

[Kerry McCarthy]

can afford agents, lawyers and managers. It is the smaller musicians and, I would argue, the musicians in the better bands—rather than the Coldplays, Mumfords and Adeles of this world—who will really struggle with this extra bureaucracy, any extra cost and any difficulty that is put in their way.

There is also a particular concern about the European Health Insurance Card and people's access to healthcare when they are travelling around Europe, which may also go out of the window. That is something else that may not be the most obvious thing for musicians, or actors, to worry about, but it will affect them.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The ending of freedom of movement will not impact that harshly on some of the bigger, multinational companies—the big tech giants that dominate the sector now. What it will impact on are the small and medium-sized enterprises within our creative sector. It will also have an impact on start-up businesses and it could result in impeding risk and innovation in the medium and long term, thereby hobbling the very drivers of our creativity.

It is profoundly disappointing that we are leaving the European Union. We will have to look for measures that will mitigate that, and that will ensure that we are aligned as closely as possible with EU partners. The thing that depresses me most is that we have carefully crafted and created this environment that lets our artists, creators, inventors and musicians succeed worldwide, and be the best in the world, and how we can so casually throw that away for nothing—absolutely nothing—disappoints me. It is something that I still hope we will have the opportunity to consider once again.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): It might help the remaining two Members who wish to catch my eye to know that we have to start the wind-ups at 3.30. By my calculation that is about 10 minutes each. If there is a Division at 3.45, do not worry because we can add time.

3.9 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing this debate. It is also a pleasure to follow such a passionate speech from my fellow musician, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). It is unusual for us both to be on the same stage as we have been exchanging places in MP4 recently.

The United Kingdom is a powerhouse when it comes to the creative industries and tourism; we punch far above our weight and we lead the world with some of the most innovative and advanced thinking that is out there in the creative sector. In 2016 the creative industries contributed a staggering £91.8 billion to the UK economy. The sector grew by 7.5% compared with growth of 3.5% for the UK economy as a whole. The sector provides for 6% of all UK jobs, and the total employment in the creative economy is around 3 million people. That includes around 76,000 jobs in Scotland and rising, contributing more than £4.5 billion to the Scottish economy. We in Scotland are proud to be a major contributor towards those figures.

Scotland saw the fastest growth in creative industries employment of all nations in the UK from 2015 to 2016, at about 13%. That is almost three times as high as in England, and more than England, Wales and Northern Ireland combined. A report commissioned for Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen in 2014 found that the creative industries in the north-east of Scotland, where my constituency of Banff and Buchan is located, employ around 6,000 people in more than 1,500 businesses. In the north-east of Scotland alone the sector generated annual revenues in excess of £600 million. The hon. Member for Edinburgh West has called this debate to discuss the future of our creative industries and tourism after the UK leaves the EU. I agree that there are challenges to overcome.

The creative industries rely on cross-border working, and many people in those industries travel regularly for work in the EU, just as European citizens come here. We know that around 7% of people working in the creative sector are non-UK EU nationals, roughly in line with the average across all industries, but a significant number none the less. I ask the Government to keep the needs of this industry in mind when designing a future immigration system, whether that be the needs of the creative industry, tourism, hospitality or indeed those of the fishing and fish processing sectors and food and drink in general, which I have spoken up for in this place on several occasions.

So far I have talked mostly about the creative industries, but I also want to talk about tourism. For those who have not visited—I highly recommend that they do—my constituency of Banff and Buchan has 48 miles of stunning Scottish coastline, with one particular stretch, between Portsoy and Pennan, having been voted as one of the top 20 most iconic coastlines in the world. That stretch of coastline is interesting. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) talked extensively about the film industry. Portsoy was the site for the recent remake of the film “Whisky Galore!” and the old 17th-century harbour was almost a character in itself. Going back to the '80s, “Local Hero”, a movie with Burt Lancaster, was set in Pennan. That goes to show how dramatic the coastline between those two villages is.

Also worth a special mention is the famous Aberdeenshire castle trail, which runs through my constituency via Duff House, Delgatie Castle and Fyvie Castle, among all the others across the north-east of Scotland. Banff and Buchan is also home to excellent heritage museums that highlight our traditional industries of fishing and farming. I should note that those museums show a living history, because those industries are far from dead in Banff and Buchan.

Golf is a popular pastime across Scotland—across the world, in fact—but Fraserburgh in my constituency has the seventh oldest, still operating, golf course in the world. *National Geographic* referred to the Banff and Buchan coast as

“one of the world's outstanding coastlines”.

The local tourism board markets the area as “Scotland's dolphin coast.” It is home to around 130 bottlenose dolphins, as well as 15 other species of cetaceans, including minke whales in the summer and autumn months. On a recent visit to Portsoy I saw someone with a telescope looking out to sea. I thought they were looking at dolphins, but it turned out they were looking for a bird

that I had never heard of: the white-billed diver, which apparently comes south of Norway only very rarely. Portsoy is one of the few places south of Norway where that bird can be seen.

I very much hope that we can use Brexit as an opportunity to grow the industry and attract more visitors to our stunning shores. One example of this opportunity can be found in VAT rules. European VAT law currently limits the discretion of member states, including the UK before our exit, to set lower rates of VAT on some goods and services. That means we are limited in our ability to reduce so-called tourism tax below the current 20%. After we leave the EU, the Government will have the opportunity to reduce tourism VAT and make the UK an even more attractive destination for foreign visitors. I hope that they will consider seizing this opportunity and use Brexit as a springboard for our tourism industry.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I welcome what the hon. Gentleman has said and congratulate him on painting a very attractive picture of his constituency. On the opportunities after Brexit with regard to VAT, as he knows, we have been promoting that issue in respect of Northern Ireland, but there can also be opportunities right across the United Kingdom. We have heard a lot of pessimism, but there are opportunities to be grasped, particularly in tourism, and I commend him for what he said about VAT.

David Duguid: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I agree that we have an opportunity to be a lot more positive about Brexit.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the possibility of varying VAT once we have left the European Union, but is he aware that 25 members of the European Union currently vary VAT on the tourism industry? In France, for example, it is only 9% for a hotel or a tourist attraction. It would be possible today for the UK Government to vary VAT on the tourism sector.

David Duguid: I have no reason to doubt the hon. Lady. That was not my understanding, but I will definitely look into that.

To conclude, we can be exceptionally proud of our creative and tourism industries in this country. I fully understand the concerns put forward by hon. Members as a result of Brexit, but I gently suggest that perhaps erring too much on the side of caution and pessimism is not necessarily the way to go. We are a world leader in this area, and that will not disappear overnight—far from it. The Government rightly speak about building a new global Britain after Brexit. Why not build it on the back of our sensational creative talent and beautiful destinations?

3.17 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing the debate and on a fantastic opening speech. I also want to express my disappointment that the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) is not in the Cabinet. He was overlooked on several occasions by Prime Ministers and, as we heard in his speech, he speaks from a position of experience and understanding

of the industry. I think I speak for a lot of people who said they felt they had a friend when he was the Minister. I also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is one half of the famous parliamentary rock band MP4: a classic line-up for a passionate speech. Once MP4 decide to go on that long-awaited British tour, we look forward to welcoming them to Blackwood Institute and Newbridge Memo and one of the larger venues that we can book.

Mrs Hodgson: Tickets cannot be touted.

Chris Evans: We have to pay them.

Last month I met Gail Renard, chair of the Writers' Guild. She was one of several people who came to meet me to talk about concerns about the impact of Brexit on the creative industries. Gail is a very interesting character. She met John and Yoko at one of their famous bed-ins. As I am a big fan of the Beatles, our meeting went on from half an hour to two hours while she told me everything about John and Yoko and their fantastic life together. But the one thing she wanted to get across to me was the real concern about freedom of movement.

The Creative Industries Federation has recommended that the Government implement sufficient structures to replace freedom of movement. The problem for those of us who were remain Members of Parliament in leave constituencies is that when we knocked on doors we were told that the No. 1 issue was freedom of movement—we were going to take back control of our borders. As we have seen, not only in the creative industries but in others, we were told that there were simple solutions to complex problems. Many people did not know about access to the single market or the customs union. The issues were not properly explained, and that was the problem with the Brexit debate.

That is why we are where we are. The problem is that selling freedom of movement to our constituents will be difficult. When they see “freedom of movement,” they think about immigration. They worry about immigration, and that is a problem for a British success story. Let there be no doubt: the creative industry is a growing sector of the economy. It is worth £92 billion—up from £85 billion in 2015. The sector makes more than 5% of the UK's gross value added product. However, all that would be impossible without European funding. If we are to lose funding from streams such as Creative Europe, as well as part of the workforce, when there is no more freedom of movement, the future of the creative industries looks bleak.

Earlier this year, entertainment industry leaders expressed concerns about freedom of movement and other post-Brexit uncertainties at a House of Lords Committee sitting. It is high time the Government listened to them. The chief executive of One Dance UK has said that freedom of movement is a vital part of its business model. Its members travel to the EU for work eight times a year, on average. A poll conducted by the Musicians Union when it held an event here a year ago with Equity found that only 2% of the music industry believed that Brexit would be good for them. An industry that produced the Rolling Stones, the Beatles and countless other bands that broke America is worried about the future. However, the key issue expressed across the industry is that, because of unique working patterns that involve a lot of travel, freedom of movement is necessary for its continued success.

[Chris Evans]

I agree with the right hon. Member for Wantage that Prime Ministers have not discussed the arts very seriously. The creative industries seem to be a bolt-on. They are not taken as a major contributor to the British economy. The sector provides a wide variety of jobs and career opportunities for people across the UK and Europe. Harry Potter, James Bond and Marvel films have been some of the highest grossing productions of the past decade. Only this week Robert Downey Jr. was welcomed to south Wales for the filming of a new Marvel film. We want to welcome more people like him. Many of those productions have been filmed primarily in the UK and across Europe, with a significant British and European workforce. In 2016 alone there were 131,000 EU nationals working in the British creative industries. Freedom of movement for workers in the creative industries is key to the success of those projects.

If we lose freedom of movement, we run the risk of limiting the production of international projects in the UK. Can you imagine, Mr Bone, if that situation affected the banking, construction or manufacturing industries? I am sure that the debate would be packed with speakers, but the creative industries seem to fall to the back of the queue. It can go on no longer. If international film production companies or musicians using large European workforces believe that it will be too difficult or costly for EU nationals to enter the UK to work, they will simply go elsewhere. I agree with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire that there will be countries in Europe, and around the world, rubbing their hands together waiting for the creative industries to leave here and set up there.

Kerry McCarthy: Is my hon. Friend aware of the EU quota rules by which at the moment TV broadcasters are required to invest 20% of their revenues in making or commissioning original content, and to spend at least 50% of their time showing European works? If British works are no longer included in that 50% quota, companies with a choice as to where they make productions will not come to Britain. They will need to make sure they are made in a European country.

Chris Evans: That is an extremely important point. What do we want to see on our television screens: low-budget foreign television productions or the high-quality drama and film productions we currently enjoy in this country? My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) will know that Wales has become a hub for BBC drama productions and for film, just as Scotland has—and Northern Ireland, with “Game of Thrones”. There is a real concern that we are almost gutting the industry.

There is also a knock-on effect. Music tours and festivals have a huge impact on larger companies but also on cafés, bars, hotels and other hospitality industries, and they attract huge crowds. We seem to be cutting our legs from under us. If limits are imposed, local enterprises will suffer. The Government need to ensure that there are either exemptions or sufficient structures in place to ensure continued employment and career growth for British and European workers in the entertainment and creative industries. The Government’s recent report on the creative industries gave absolutely no information on their plans for the sector’s future. The sector often

has to plan out its projects far in advance, so it needs assurances now that its projects and workforces will not be hindered by our leaving the European Union.

There should be no doubt: there is a lot of money in the creative industries. Netflix and Amazon are competing for the same space; it is a great time for the industry. We must realise how important the creative industries are. Performing and visual arts, and film, TV and video are second and third respectively only to the IT, software and computer services sector. In 2015 those two sectors combined employed 517,000 people—20% of the entire creative industry workforce—and their economic outputs amounted to £24.4 billion, or 28% of the entire output. We cannot pretend that Brexit will not affect that. Many of those projects rely on freedom of movement. The Government should bring clarity to that.

I intervened earlier on the hon. Member for Edinburgh West. The Minister and I will probably bump into each other in the hallway tomorrow, as we are neighbours, and perhaps I can discuss the matter with him then. I would like the Government, if they take the creative industries seriously, to make two announcements. As I explained earlier, I would like officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to be seconded to the Department for Exiting the European Union. I would also like the Culture Secretary to set up a Cabinet working group on Brexit, given the importance of the creative industries to the economy. Outside Parliament, I would like representatives of the creative workforce to be on the Creative Industries Council, which is currently chaired by John McVay of Pact. No creative trade unions are on it. I would like Equity, the Musicians Union and other creative industries unions to be invited on to it. The issue is too important. We are now perhaps 18 months away from Brexit. As in other areas, there is a need for certainty, and I look to the Minister to provide it.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): I thank hon. Members for keeping to time. The House is expected to divide at 3.54. That may help Front-Bench spokesmen.

3.27 pm

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone.

I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) for securing this important debate. As she said, tourism and the creative industries play a hugely significant part in the UK and Scottish economies. She is right to point out that Brexit could have hugely damaging consequences for both those sectors. It is incumbent on the UK Government to ensure that tourism and our creative industries are not damaged by Brexit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who made an excellent speech, hit the nail on the head when he said the creative industries are like no other. They are fired by imagination, talent and invention, and they exist to be appreciated, enjoyed and transferred across audiences, without regard to frontiers or borders. I fear that he was right when he said that leaving the European Union will be an absolute disaster for our creative and tourism industries. As has been said often in the debate, my hon. Friend speaks not just from a wealth of political experience but as

someone who enjoyed a highly successful career as a musician in two of Scotland's finest bands—Runrig and Big Country—although his credentials are perhaps now in question as he is a member of MP4, along with the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). I suggest to both of them that they may want to get their European tour in sooner rather than later.

My hon. Friend and I, and indeed all SNP Members, desperately want Scotland to remain the inclusive, tolerant, outward-looking country that it is, and we are firmly of the opinion that that can best be done by protecting and maintaining our existing relationship with Europe. The free movement of people within the European Union—we have heard much about that today, including in the good contribution from the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans)—enriches the cultural life of everyone, not just in Scotland or the United Kingdom, but across the European continent. Anything that threatens that is, in my opinion, to be deeply regretted and is a backward and retrograde step.

Scotland's creative community has benefited enormously from four decades of support and collaboration with our European partners. As well as culturally enriching us and bringing the welcome free movement of people, it has brought access to the European funding from which Scottish cultural and creative organisations have benefited over the past 40 years. It is entirely understandable that fear of losing access to that enormous pool of talent and vital pool of EU funding is causing huge concern in the creative sector. With restrictions likely to be placed on the free movement of people, including artists and performers, when asked before the EU referendum in 2016, 96% of members of the Creative Industries Federation stated that their preference was for the UK to remain in the European Union.

The latest figures released by the federation show that the concerns felt two years ago about Brexit are as strong as ever. In the most recent report, published in January, 80% of respondents said that they were not confident that Britain will maintain its leading global reputation post-Brexit—indeed, 21% said that a “no deal” outcome would make them consider moving part or all of their business out of the UK, and 40% said that a “no deal” outcome would be harmful to their ability to export. Grave concerns about the ability to continue to attract the best and brightest to work in the UK post-Brexit were laid out at the end of last year, with three quarters of firms surveyed saying that they employed EU nationals. A remarkable two thirds of those firms believed that they could not currently fill those posts with UK workers. Indeed, almost 60% of companies in the Creative Industries Federation survey said that they were already facing a skills shortage, even with current access to EU workers.

Those findings are not isolated examples of the grave concerns in the industry about Brexit. The significant skills shortages in the UK creative industries was also highlighted in a report by UK Music. As the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) highlighted, when UK Music asked its members what impact the UK leaving the EU would have on them, only 2% thought that Brexit would have a positive impact on their chances of work, whereas 50% feared that leaving the EU would have a negative impact. Such findings are repeated across the sector. Equity, the trade union that represents more than 42,000 performers and

creative workers, conducted a survey that showed that 46% of UK bids for European funding are accepted, making the UK second only to Germany. It also showed that the UK receives 24% of all European Research Council grants. The message coming loud and clear from our creative sector is that the UK benefits from being a full member of the European Union. There is consensus across our creative industries that Brexit will be very bad for business, and I urge the Government to listen, engage fully, and act on the well-founded concerns and well-documented reality facing our creative sector as we approach Brexit.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh West skilfully and rightly highlighted the link between tourism and the creative industries, and specifically the Edinburgh International Festival which, as she rightly said, is a gateway to the rest of Scotland and the UK, as hundreds of thousands of visitors disperse from Edinburgh to every corner of the country. Along with others, their presence has a massive impact on our hospitality sector. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) spoke about tourism in his constituency, which has 46 miles of coastline. I do not want to get into a debate or argument about whose coastline is bigger, but the coastline of Argyll and Bute is longer than the coastline of France. We know what we are talking about when it comes to having a coastline; we know what it is to have an important tourist industry.

Like much of Scotland, my constituency relies heavily on tourism, not just for the visitor pound, but for employment. We have some of the most breathtaking and unspoiled scenery anywhere in the world, and we are investing heavily in whisky tourism because massive numbers of European visitors come to Argyll and Bute every year to visit our vast range of distilleries. Indeed, whisky tourism is so great, and the whisky industry booming to such an extent, that no fewer than a dozen distilleries have opened across Scotland in the last few years and no fewer than 40 are in various stages of planning and construction, and hoping to come on stream in the next couple of decades. As we speak, tourism is booming. We in Argyll and Bute need those tourists to come, but I fear that Brexit will do nothing to help, and indeed will be hugely detrimental.

Just this week there was another significant investment in whisky tourism. That is welcome, but let us remember that there is hardly an hotel in Scotland that does not rely on the hard work of our EU nationals. Although it is not a patch on Argyll and Bute, Perth and North Perthshire is also a particularly beautiful part of the world, and my hon. Friend will be aware of the contribution made by the tourism industry and our highly valued EU nationals to the economy of his constituency. I commend him on his passionate defence of the digital single market, and I agree that the Prime Minister's seeming delight at abandoning that vehicle for investment, harmonisation, collaboration and market development was bewildering to anyone who has ever engaged with the creative industries. I share the concerns of the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) about leaving the digital single market, and I sincerely hope that his voice will be heard by those on his side of the House.

The UK's creative and cultural industries have benefited greatly—economically, creatively, and culturally—from being part of the European Union for the past 40 years. Nothing will improve the arrangements that we currently

[Brendan O'Hara]

enjoy as a member of the EU, and the Government must redouble their efforts to ensure that this world-class sector is not destroyed by Brexit. It is glaringly obvious that remaining a member of the single market at the very least is the best way to do that, so that this country is still able to attract and keep the creative talent that is vital to allow people in that industry to work, perform and exhibit in this country, free from unnecessary barriers. I look forward to hearing the Minister's explanation for why leaving the single market could ever be good for the creative industries.

3.38 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I apologise to the Minister and the House, but because the SNP spokesperson spoke for 11 minutes that leaves only 16 minutes before the Division, two of which must be devoted to the person who secured the debate, so it looks as though we will have to come back after the vote.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) on securing today's debate. She rightly pointed out the huge workforce challenges that Brexit presents to the creative industries and tourism and she made important points about musicians and the need for a single EU work permit. I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) who in his characteristically self-deprecatory, tongue-in-cheek speech made some serious points about the importance of the creative industries. Quite rightly, he spoke about the film tax relief in which he played a big part, as well as the importance of protecting the single digital market post-Brexit. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend—I shall call him that—the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). He described tourism and the creative industries as sitting awkwardly together. I rarely disagree with him, but I do on that point because much tourism is driven by culture and our creative industries, including the music industry, which he knows well, theatre and television. In my constituency of Cardiff West, the production of programmes such as “Doctor Who” and “Sherlock” has drawn tourism into the area. I recently visited Belfast and saw the “Game of Thrones” studios, and although I cannot tell Members anything about the studios because I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement, I can say that they have brought many visitors into Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire also rightly pointed out that the creative industries are the fastest growing sector of our economy, and he made a startling revelation. I have always wondered what makes him cry, and we now know it is Brexit that makes him weep when he is alone at home. He made a substantial case for our creative industries and rightly mentioned UK Music, ably led by its chief executive Michael Dugher, and the Musicians Union, under Horace Trubridge's new leadership. He was rudely interrupted—or intervened on—by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who continued her vendetta against Coldplay. I think she should remember that many people are employed in our creative industries as a result of Coldplay's success and be careful not to tarnish one of our strongest performing bands, lest she cause unemployment in those industries.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), who, as he pointed out, has recently been super-subbing in MP4 on television, told us about his constituency, with its golf and its beautiful coastline and how it is the home of the white billed diver. His description made it sound like the garden of Eden, but if “Whisky Galore” was filmed there, it might also have been the place where they invented original sin. I congratulate him on a very good speech and on making the point about VAT—although, as was pointed out to him, that is actually within the gift of the Government, whether or not we are a member of the European Union.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) mentioned the Blackwood Miners' Institute—I was there with him at the Manic Street Preachers homecoming gig a few years ago—and made some very important points about freedom of movement and about arts and the creative industries. It is important not to make a distinction between the subsidised arts and the creative industries. One of the strengths of what has happened in recent years is that those two things have been brought together into one viewpoint. The film industry receives tax credits, as the right hon. Member for Wantage pointed out, and yes, some of our theatres receive subsidies via the Arts Council, but they are all part of the same ecology that produces our fantastic creative industries and makes us a world leader in music, theatre, film and so on. The right hon. Gentleman also made the very important point about ensuring that the Creative Industries Council has workforce representation on it, which I have been campaigning for from the Front Bench for some time. The Government said that once they had published their creative industries strategy they would encourage the Creative Industries Council to have that representation, and I hope to hear from the Minister what he now intends to do about that.

I will respond to the debate more broadly by saying that the creative industries obviously face a real challenge from Brexit, as does the tourism industry. Like many in this room, I voted remain—unlike you, Mr Bone.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that when I sit in this Chair, I have no views about anything other than about keeping him in order.

Kevin Brennan: And if you believe that, Mr Bone, you are an impartial Chair at all times. I completely accept that.

I also voted against triggering article 50, partly because of the huge challenges it presents to our creative industries. Just recently I met with a major broadcaster which, because of the loss of the status of licensing across the European Union single market, is moving 700 jobs out of the UK, to Amsterdam, Luxembourg or Dublin. It has already decided to do that because it needs to be sure that if it is licensed in one country it is licensed right across the European Union.

Since 2007, according to the Government's own figures in an answer from the Minister, the creative industries sector has received something in the realm of £190 million in European Union funding from the European regional development fund alone, most of which has been spent in the nations and regions of the UK, including about £60 million in Yorkshire. That is much more redistributive spending on the creative industries and the arts sector that we often find from other sources of funding. Local authorities have suffered huge disproportionate cuts in

the arts and in tourism. In tourism, the biggest cuts have been in local authorities, with more than 50% of cuts in tourism employees since 2009 being in local authorities. That is a huge issue.

My critique of the Government is that their recently announced sector deal for the creative industries is insufficient. They claim that it amounted to a £150-million package, but only £25 million or so is not money that has previously been announced. That is not the scale of ambition required. Also, announcements have been made recently about continuing with funding in relation to the music and dance scheme, the dance and drama awards, cultural programmes and so on, but none of that money is genuinely new either—it is just a continuation of what is already happening. The Government need to step up with greater ambition, along the lines of the Bazalgette report that was released last year. They need to do more on the workforce, on free movement, on skills and on freelancers. Lots of people working in the creative industries are freelancers; how about getting hold of the Bill that has been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) to give freelancers shared parental leave? That is a great campaign. The Government have said that they are reviewing that, and I urge the Minister to think more about it and talk with his colleagues, in order to make it a reality. The Government could do more by having a cultural capital fund, as the Labour party promised in our manifesto. They could do lots more on all those sorts of issues.

On tourism, I will obviously say that Cardiff is the most beautiful part of the country and encourage right hon. and hon. Members to visit but, on a serious note, I have been travelling around the country to different tourist locations to talk to the industry about Brexit and the issues faced. The industry was unanimous in that devaluation is not the way forward as a policy on tourism. Britain will not become the most successful tourism sector it can be simply by relying on devaluing the pound and going for a cheap offer. We must ensure we have quality, and that includes investment in skills, in our cultural heritage and in the workforce.

It is also about time to look again at the idea of social tourism, which was so interestingly and ably promoted by an all-party parliamentary group back in 2011. Its report, called “Giving Britain a break: inquiry into the social and economic benefits of social tourism”, was about ensuring that we use up the spare capacity in our domestic tourism industry to help those families who most need a break. It would be good to see the Government introduce a social element in to their tourism policy, to ensure that families really benefit and our tourism industry benefits from being able to use up its spare capacity.

I do not want to take up much more time, because time is pressing. If we are going down this road to Brexit, a road that many of us in this particular debate do not seem to have supported, we must ensure that the Government show a great deal more ambition in relation to our creative industry and tourism sectors.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. We probably have about four or five minutes before the Division bell goes.

I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) and congratulate her on calling this important debate. I do not think I can do as well as the shadow Minister in name-dropping various pop groups and organisations that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) might have been a member of in his earlier and current days, but I can certainly say that Brexit is happening. The people have spoken in the referendum.

I am much more optimistic than the hon. Member for Edinburgh West and many in the Chamber at the moment. We have heard a good deal of negativity and pessimism this afternoon, but I much prefer the view taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), who is no longer in his place, who spoke about the opportunities and the optimism. It is always helpful to see glasses as half full rather than half empty.

I welcome the contributions from right hon. and hon. Members, and thank them for stimulating a lively debate in which the crucial role of the UK's creative and tourism sectors has been recognised—I think that on that subject we are all in agreement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) made his address to the Chamber—with his usual charm, if I may say so. He is certainly missed in the sector, contrary to his self-deprecating remarks. He was Minister for some six years, and I think I am right in saying that the industry wrote a group letter to a national newspaper saying just how very much he would be missed. Frankly, his departure provoked an extraordinary letter of appreciation.

My right hon. Friend and others mentioned supporting arts in the regions. In this coming financial year, 75% of Arts Council England's funding will be going outside of the London area. The Department is supporting the cultural development fund and the northern cultural regeneration fund. A lot of money—rightly so—is going out of London and into the regions.

As the Minister for the arts, heritage and tourism, I am responding to this debate on the effects of the UK leaving the EU on the tourism and creative industry sectors. We have created the best in this country, as many Members from all parts of the House have mentioned. In my view, we had the best before 1973, and we will have the best after we leave. I am also happy to say that my Department already works across Government, including with civil servants at the Department for Exiting the European Union, and there is no reason to think that we will not continue to do so. In fact, we always look to work together.

I will make some overall points about the sectors and the challenges of EU exit, and I will then respond in turn to some of the key issues raised by colleagues. I recognise that there is particular interest in the devolved arrangements for both sectors following EU exit. I am keen that the future arrangement works for all sides. I am particularly looking forward to meeting colleagues from the devolved Administrations this Thursday in Edinburgh to discuss their particular concerns about tourism in more detail. I want it to be an ongoing discussion. If I do not have time to talk about that ongoing discussion in the limited time available this afternoon, I will be pleased to follow up in writing.

Members will be aware that the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee recently published its report, “The potential impact of Brexit on the creative industries,

[Michael Ellis]

tourism and the digital single market”. Some of the points raised in this debate echo the conclusions of that report. I have noted those conclusions, and the Government will submit our response in due course in the normal way.

To set the scene, Members will be aware that the sectors that DCMS represents are an absolutely huge success story for the UK—there is no doubt about that—and tourism and the creative industries are no exception. To a large degree, their success has gone hand in hand: tourism helps the creative industries thrive, as the shadow Minister mentioned, and vice versa. As an example of the close relationship, UK Music’s “Wish you were here” report for 2017 stated that there were 12.5 million music tourists in 2016—that is music tourists alone—and nearly 50,000 full-time jobs were sustained by music tourism. It is huge. In 2016, tourism was worth more than £65 billion to the economy, and it is still growing every year. In fact, it is growing exponentially. Provisional figures suggest that 2017—we have most of the figures—was a record-breaking year, with just under 39 million overseas visitors to the UK. That was an increase of 3% on 2016, which was itself a record year. The situation is extremely promising. The creative industries are also a major cultural and economic success for the UK. It is a high-value, high-growth sector that was worth nearly £92 billion to the economy in 2016.

These sectors play an important role in showing the world the very best of Britain and in strengthening global relationships. We are No. 1 in the world for soft power. There are many reasons for that, but one of the main ones is the strength of the sector. The sectors also play a role in demonstrating that we are open for business.

Mrs Hodgson: Will the Minister give way?

Michael Ellis: I am sorry, I do not have time.

We are not resting on our laurels. As Members will be aware, DCMS recently published its sector deal for the creative industries. That important piece of work sets out an ambitious proposal on how Government and industry will work together to accelerate growth and productivity. The sector deal is a landmark document, and I urge Members to look at it if they have not already. It recognises the critical importance of the creative industries to the UK’s economy, society and global influence. We intend to publish a similar deal for the tourism sector in due course.

I would now like to focus on the freedom of movement point that was raised by one or two Members, as it is a key issue that colleagues and stakeholders have raised. The UK tourism and creative industry sectors have strong ties with the European Union. There are a large number of international workers in both sectors and they regularly move across the EU. EU nationals form a significant proportion of the domestic tourism market.

3.55 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4.10 pm

On resuming—

Michael Ellis: As I was saying, the UK’s creative industries likewise require access to skilled workers from the European Union. It is important that UK and EU workers can quickly and efficiently transfer across member states on time-limited projects such as film co-productions, or as touring musicians and performers.

I have spoken to a number of tourism industry leaders since taking on this role, to build a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities on freedom of movement and to ensure that the sector can continue to have access to the necessary skills. We are working closely with the Home Office, Revenue and Customs and the Department for Exiting the European Union to ensure that they are well informed of these issues. The new immigration system will not come into place until 2021, following the agreed implementation period. During that time, existing arrangements will broadly continue to apply to EU citizens coming to the UK to visit, work or study.

I turn now to the UK’s reputation as a tourism destination. Tourism continues to be a significant success for the UK. In 2017, the World Economic Forum found that the UK had the fifth most competitive tourism market in the world. Europe is our key market. The projected figures for 2017 are that, of the 39 million visits to the UK, nearly two thirds were by EU residents. Outbound as well as inbound visits are important and, similarly, of the 71 million visits overseas by UK residents, it is projected that three quarters were to other EU countries. Clearly, it is in both the UK’s and the EU’s interests to maintain this ease of travel and smooth entry at the border. We are also working closely with industry partners to promote transparency for consumers, and internationally to promote open global markets.

We are pressed for time, but another matter that I want to mention is access to EU funding streams for tourism and the creative industries. To provide some certainty for our sectors in the near future, Members will know that at the joint press conference between the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and Michel Barnier on 19 March this year it was confirmed that UK organisations could continue to bid for EU programmes until December 2020. Details of the next multiannual financial framework are expected later this year, and that will provide greater clarity on our position. We will seek to stay beyond December 2020 in programmes that are mutually beneficial to the UK and EU and will continue to actively investigate the funding streams that support our sectors.

On the regulatory framework, the UK and EU already have close regulatory alignment built on trust in one another’s institutions. That co-operation will continue. Discussions include European legislation on consumer protection as well as regulations on temporary working arrangements.

Brexit presents both challenges and opportunities for these sectors, as it does for the whole of the United Kingdom. Although much of the public debate focuses on the challenge, I have huge confidence in the tourism and creative industry sectors and in their abilities to capitalise on the exciting opportunities. I am keen that the Government should continue to support tourism—they will, so long as I am Minister for tourism, and beyond—and the creative industries at this very important time, listening to the views of our stakeholders. I would likewise be pleased to stay engaged with parliamentary colleagues

on this topic. I firmly believe that tourism and the creative industries will continue to be a major economic driver for the UK and will only grow in importance in the years ahead. There is no reason to believe that the upward trends will not continue as we exit the European Union. Our culture and creativity play a huge role in making the UK a highly attractive place to visit and work.

4.14 pm

Christine Jardine: I thank right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this debate for rehearsing all the arguments and laying out clearly why tourism and the creative industries need protection and special measures to help them through the challenges they are going to face if Brexit goes ahead—everything from the impassioned plea from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) for our creative industries as world leaders, to the argument that I confess I did not mean to spark between the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) about who has the most beautiful constituency. I would not like to comment on either of them, except to say they are both wrong—it is Edinburgh.

I hope the Minister will take on board everything he has heard from this side of the Chamber today.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Energy Drink Sales to Children

4.15 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the sale of energy drinks to children.

I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am pleased and proud to have been able to secure this debate. The UK's growing childhood dietary and obesity crisis is something that the Government need to address. Government policy holds the key to that challenge and I hope that today's debate will contribute to that.

To many of us, the sight of a child drinking a can of energy drink might not be something that we would even take a second look at—it has become so commonplace now—but in the last 10 to 15 years there has been an explosion in the popularity of these drinks, particularly among children and adolescents. It is estimated that between 2006 and 2014 the sale of energy drinks in the UK increased by 155%, and it is still growing. While the soft drinks market is generally declining, the global energy drinks market is projected to grow by 3.5% annually until at least 2020. On average, young people in the UK consume more energy drinks than those in other EU countries, which means that it is British children who are most at risk from the growing energy drinks market.

Furthermore, it is becoming clearer that many children and parents are just not aware of the health risks of regularly consuming these drinks. Many parents and young people will not be aware that on the back of a can of energy drink are the words, "Not recommended for children." The Government rightly ensure that any product that is high in caffeine carries that warning. How can it be that the Government force companies to warn that their products are unsafe for children to drink, but follow with no enforcement measures or protections against children drinking them? Why are we allowing our young people to drink these highly caffeinated drinks, often several times a day, without any protection?

I asked myself that question after watching Jamie Oliver's "Friday Night Feast". The programme investigated the dangers and the prevalence of children regularly drinking these drinks. I was shocked. A massive 68% of those aged between 10 and 18 said they were consumers of energy drinks, with 12% of those saying they drank as much as 1 litre of energy drink per session. To put that in perspective, a single litre bottle of energy drink can contain the equivalent caffeine of five shots of espresso and 12 teaspoons of sugar. Even more shockingly, they can be purchased for as little as 79p. I like my coffee in the morning as much as anyone else, but I think Members would join me in my shock if ahead of us in the morning queue for our lattes we saw a 10-year-old child order and drink a double, triple or even quadruple espresso. Why are children allowed to purchase these energy drinks?

In my area of Teesside earlier this year a 16-year-old child was allowed to purchase 12 cans of energy drink from a single store. He went on to down five to six cans in a single sitting—the equivalent of approximately seven shots of espresso. He did it because he said he needed a boost to get through his session at college, but he was sent home from school later that day by teachers

[Anna Turley]

said to be fuming at his behaviour. Luckily, he had no immediate health problems as a result. However, had he drunk any more, it is possible that it could have caused cardiac arrest or other serious health problems. There are currently no protections or measures to limit the amount of these drinks that a child can purchase. It is a danger to young people and something that needs to be addressed.

One of the biggest problems is the way these drinks are promoted and advertised to children and young people. They are marketed as giving boosts to physical or mental performance, which means that children are purchasing and drinking them before school or sports, in the perverse belief that they are somehow improving their mental or physical health.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): My hon. Friend might be aware that Ross High School in Tranent in my constituency introduced “fizz-free February” in 2017, stopping the sale of energy and carbonated drinks. They carried it on, with the consent of the pupils, and all the high schools in East Lothian joined fizz-free February in 2018. It is a voluntary action taken by the schools and children. Does my hon. Friend agree that more needs to be done to empower schools?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I congratulate those schools on showing leadership and having a beneficial effect on children’s ability to learn in school. He is absolutely right that the key is Government policy. There is too much confusion, and we should not rely on schools and shops preventing children from accessing energy drinks.

Studies show that regularly consuming large quantities of caffeine can result in increased blood pressure, sleep disturbance, headaches and stomach aches. Energy drinks have also been proven to affect children’s mental health, causing self-destructive behaviour, insomnia, problems with behavioural regulation and poor lifestyle behaviours, such as a poor diet and the consumption of fast food. It has also been shown that children who drink energy drinks are more likely to consume alcohol, smoke or take drugs in later life. Governments of all parties have introduced important and much-needed measures to tackle childhood obesity and poor dietary health, but I believe that if we leave this avenue open, children will be at risk of poor health impacts, both now and in their future life.

I am sure that many companies will say that they do not directly market their products to children, but energy drinks are highly sweetened and are often sold for as little as 30p, and the packaging sometimes contains marketing techniques such as video game rewards. In addition, studies have found that children perversely associate these sometimes unhealthy drinks with sporting activities. Many of the larger energy drink manufacturers sponsor extreme sports events such as the Red Bull cliff diving series, or major sporting occasions such as the Carabao cup.

Energy drinks are often associated with children’s favourite sports or a general culture of glamorous, adventurous, risk-taking behaviour. Many carry names such as Relentless, Monster and Boost, which often look thrilling and risky to children and have associations

with danger and excitement. Young people report that they see such products advertised on television, in video games and through sports sponsorships, despite pledges from advertisers to reduce such advertising. In a recent study organised by Teesside University, in conjunction with four other universities in the north-east, one child said:

“If you’re playing on your tablet or something and you’re playing a game, an advert pops up for Relentless.”

Will the Minister promise to look at ways of strengthening the rules on how those companies advertise and promote themselves to children?

Consuming energy drinks affects not just children’s health but their education. Many teachers, teaching unions and school staff have expressed the view that students should not be able to purchase such drinks. A survey carried out by the NASUWT found that 13% of teachers and school leaders identified energy drinks as the main contributor to poor behaviour that they had witnessed. Teachers have previously said that such drinks are a contributory factor to classroom violence and falling asleep in class.

Many schools have already prohibited energy drinks from school grounds, but that is not enough on its own. Teachers need Government support. Banning energy drinks from schools does not prevent students from drinking them off site and then coming into school. A study commissioned by the Scottish Government found that one in four 13 to 15-year-olds purchased an energy drink when they went out of school at lunch time. Will the Minister commit to supporting teachers and schools by joining them in prohibiting children from buying such drinks?

I am sure that many Members have seen in the press that retailers such as Waitrose, Tesco and WHSmith, and many cinema chains and petrol garages, have already stopped selling energy drinks to under-16s. I welcome those steps and agree that they are important, but they are not enough. The Association of Convenience Stores estimates that 53% of independent convenience retailers do not sell energy drinks, but the lack of clarity about how often children can purchase and drink them means that there are still hundreds, if not thousands, of outlets where children can buy such drinks with no protection. I recently heard of an offer that enabled children to buy four cans of an energy drink for £1. I heard that one child was going in, buying four drinks and splitting them among his friends. They are readily accessible and very cheap, and there is not enough clarity or regulation, so retailers do not know how to handle it.

It is not enough for the Government to leave it to retailers, because only responsible retailers will take the responsible steps. That would leave children’s health to the lottery of whether their local shop will sell the drinks to them. When asked about this issue previously in Parliament and in written questions, Ministers have said that they will follow it and look at any scientific evidence, but there is already ample scientific evidence—at least 11 qualitative and quantitative studies have been carried out on the subject.

Teesside University has recently joined four other universities in the north-east to carry out research on this subject. It found that such drinks are readily available in many local shops, and that own-brand energy drinks are among the cheapest drinks available—nearly always

cheaper than water. It also found that branding, marketing and social norms are important factors in shaping children's consumption choices. Children have found that the information on the packaging is sometimes confusing. One child taking part in the study said:

"Some younger kids, they read the label but say they don't know what...4.8 sugar means. They don't know what it means—is that a lot or is it not a lot?"

The Government must take further steps to better educate young people about food choices and the effect that sugar, caffeine and other substances can have on the body. When asked about this topic previously, Ministers have referred to the upcoming childhood obesity plan, which the Minister is taking forward. Will he clarify whether the Government envisage changes to the sale of energy drinks being part of the obesity strategy, or will there be separate measures? Will he meet me to discuss this issue further?

We know that consuming energy drinks is not healthy for children, that teachers and parents want them prohibited, that many retailers do not believe it is right that children can purchase them and that, given that the packaging carries a warning, energy drink producers themselves do not think children should be consuming them. The Government have said in the past that they are willing to look at the issue, but will the Minister commit to listening to parents, teachers, manufacturers, retailers and health campaigners such as Jamie Oliver and implement a full ban on the sale of these highly caffeinated and, frankly, highly dangerous energy drinks to children?

4.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Steve Brine): All good things come to those who wait. After the delay, here we are.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) on securing the debate. I know that there are competing pressures on Members' time today, but I am surprised that there are not more here for this debate on a big, emerging issue that is gathering momentum. My ministerial colleagues and I have been asked about it at Health questions previously—perhaps that is what the hon. Lady was referring to. I thank her for introducing the debate and for setting out the case very clearly.

We all agree that the regular consumption of energy drinks by children is not appropriate at all. I say that as one who has young children. That applies especially to those under 16, as energy drinks often contain a lot of caffeine and sugar—I will talk about both. They are often coupled with other sources of caffeine and sugar in children's diets. Too much of a good thing, or too much of a bad thing in this case, can lead to difficulties sleeping and headaches—I have heard stories about that—and there is obviously an effect in terms of tooth decay and weight gain. In addition to the health and wellbeing impacts of the risk to children of consuming large volumes of energy drinks, there is anecdotal evidence, notably from schools, that their consumption has a very negative impact on children's behaviour and, in turn, their learning. The hon. Lady gave an example from her constituency, and I have heard about countless cases as a constituency MP and through the media. It is right that we are having this debate and that we continue to

examine the issue of the consumption of energy drinks by children, but this is not just about children; adults should also look at the small print on such drinks, because too much is not good for anybody.

The hon. Lady gave some figures, and I will give some of my own. A 250 ml can of an energy drink usually contains about 80 mg of caffeine, which is similar to two or three cans of cola, a mug of instant coffee or, as the hon. Lady said, an espresso. Some of the smaller energy "shot" products contain twice as much caffeine.

EU food information regulations require specific labelling for high-caffeine drinks and foods where caffeine has been added for a psychological effect. Such labelling helps consumers to identify foods with a high caffeine content where they may not expect to find it. The British Soft Drinks Association's code of practice states that high-caffeine soft drinks should not be marketed, advertised or promoted to children under 16. It is right about that, of course. Amid growing public concern, and in line with that voluntary industry code, we have recently seen major supermarkets banning the sale of such products to under-16s. When companies do the right thing, I always think it is worth putting that on the record. Asda, Aldi, Co-op Food, Lidl, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Waitrose have all voluntarily decided to ban the sale of these products to under-16s and they deserve credit for that action.

It is important that the Government remain open-minded and continue to look at any new evidence that emerges. I promise the House that we certainly are and we certainly will. The European Food Safety Authority published an opinion on the safety of caffeine less than two years ago, in May 2015. It derived safe daily intakes for adults and children and concluded that, when consumed at those intake levels, caffeine raises no serious concerns for the general healthy population, but based on current evidence on caffeine safety, the Food Standards Agency, for which I have ministerial responsibility, advises that children or other people sensitive to caffeine should consume caffeine only in moderation. That advice has remained unchanged up to this point. The hon. Lady may be aware that in March, the Science and Technology Committee launched an inquiry into the consumption of energy drinks. We welcome the inquiry very much and we recently submitted our evidence on behalf of the Government—I know she will look for that.

In the light of renewed, obvious and justified public concern, recently the Food Standards Agency has undertaken a literature review to identify if any new robust scientific studies have been conducted since the 2015 EFSA review that I mentioned. On 20 March, the results of the review and the information provided by the #notforchildren campaign were presented to the UK's committee on toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment, for consideration. In particular, the committee is now considering whether a review of caffeine consumption in children and adolescents is required to ascertain whether the studies published since the EFSA opinion add significantly to the body of evidence.

Retailers have acted to restrict the consumption of energy drinks. I am pleased to note that alongside all the supermarkets that I mentioned, other prominent retailers such as WHSmith and Boots, which have a significant high street presence in my constituency and, I am sure, in the hon. Lady's, have also voluntarily acted

[Steve Brine]

to restrict their sales to under-16s. She mentioned this but it is worth repeating that many small retailers, which may be seen as the villain in the piece—I do not think that the facts bear that out—restrict the sales of energy drinks to children. I understand that around half the Association of Convenience Stores' nearly 50,000 shops have implemented a voluntary ban on the sale of energy drinks to under-16s. Good for them and thanks to them.

In schools, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and the hon. Member for Redcar, energy drinks are not permitted within the school food standards. Schools have the power to confiscate, retain or dispose of any item that is banned by the school rules, which can include energy drinks. Some schools already do that. I was very interested to hear about fizz-free February—I will google it later and see where it takes me.

The school food standards came into force in January 2015. They define the food and drinks that must be provided, those that are restricted and those that must not be provided. They apply to all food and drink provided to pupils on and off school premises. I am due to see the Schools Minister shortly about another matter, but I will discuss this issue with him and I thank the hon. Lady for raising it.

Martin Whitfield: Does the Minister have any comments about the advertising of high-energy drinks through computer games and on social media?

Steve Brine: That is an emerging policy area that I am taking very close interest in, as the Public Health Minister and someone with an interest in the public health and child obesity agendas. In the same way that the major retailers that I put on the record have shown what I suggest is a great deal of corporate responsibility, I suggest that the producers of these drinks might also take a long, hard look and consider their social and moral responsibility, so that they can stay within the spirit of the guidelines.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): In the spirit of co-operation, because there was a mention of the Scottish Government's study, what engagement has the Minister had with Public Health Ministers in the devolved nations? Does he agree that sharing ideas, approaches and policies across the UK and beyond will be the best way to tackle this issue?

Steve Brine: I completely agree. Personally, I have not had that engagement, but I will check with my officials and I will be surprised if they have not. If the hon. Lady wishes to facilitate that engagement, I would be very happy.

I want to touch briefly on sugar. Many energy drinks contain high levels of sugar. Studies conducted in children and adolescents indicate that higher consumption of sugars, including the sugar-sweetened drinks that we are talking about, is also associated with a greater risk of tooth decay, weight gain and all the other health impacts—look at the challenges that we have in the

health service with type 2 diabetes. Latest figures continue to show that our childhood obesity rates remain far too high. Almost a quarter of children are overweight or obese when they start primary school in England, rising to around a third by the time they leave. That is not good enough and the Government and I are far from happy about it. Intakes of sugar are currently more than double the recommended amount across all age groups. Teenagers are consuming just over 14% of their energy from sugar, and over a fifth of this sugar intake comes from sugar-sweetened soft drinks.

Key measures in what I think was a well received, world-leading childhood obesity plan, launched in August 2016, include the soft drinks industry levy, which seems to have been around for ages but came into force less than two weeks ago, on 6 April. We are already seeing improvements—a number of soft drink manufacturers have announced that they have or they will reformulate their products to reduce sugar levels. I have mentioned many times in this House the manufacturers that I think deserve credit for doing that and I hope more will follow. More than half of all drinks that we estimate would otherwise have been in scope of the levy have reduced their sugar content to below the levy threshold, which was the intention of the policy.

The sugar reduction and wider reformulation programme is being led and run by Public Health England, for which I have responsibility, and applies to all sectors of industry: retailers, manufacturers and the out-of-home sector, which includes restaurants, takeaways and delivery companies, cafés and the good old-fashioned pub. Public Health England will shortly publish an assessment of progress on sugar reduction, which I eagerly await. We will use that to determine whether sufficient progress has been made in our view and whether alternative or additional levers need to be considered.

The hon. Member for Redcar mentioned the possibility of revision to the child obesity plan. We always said that the child obesity plan was the start of a conversation, not the end. She mentioned Jamie Oliver; I pay great tribute to his work and that of his team, who I met recently just before the Easter recess when we discussed this issue and many others. We have always said that if we need to go further we will, and that assessment that PHE is carrying out on the initial impact of the industry soft drinks levy will be part of the determination of whether we need to do that. I have said in the House before and I will say again that the hon. Lady should watch this space.

In conclusion, the actions that we have talked about and the stuff that we look to cannot entirely eliminate the sale of energy drinks to under-16s. However, I assure hon. Members and the public that this is a matter that the Government, the Secretary of State and I are looking at very carefully. We will monitor the situation extremely closely in the light of the emerging scientific evidence and public concern—I understand that we have to take both into consideration. If we conclude that further Government action is needed to restrict the sale of energy drinks to children, we will not hesitate to act. Our actions have shown in the past that we never hesitate to act when the evidence points us in that direction.

Question put and agreed to.

Leaving the EU: Future Trade Remedies

4.39 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered future trade remedies after the UK leaves the EU.

It is a pleasure to introduce this debate with you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. If our future trade proves as free and fair as I know you will be, we will be making progress.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the hugely important and wide-ranging issue of the trade remedies that will be employed by global Britain after we leave the European Union. To bring focus to the debate, I will mainly address the position faced by the modern ceramics industry and other advanced manufacturing businesses in Stoke-on-Trent, but I am sure that other Members will be able to draw parallels with relevant trading sectors in their constituencies.

In 2017, the UK's total trade in goods and services deficit was 1.4% of GDP. Importantly, that looks to be the lowest annual deficit this century. Indeed, I checked the Office for National Statistics historical data series, and it looks to me to be the lowest deficit as a percentage of GDP since 1998 and less than half what it was in Labour's economic meltdown of 2008. I am not sure whether the Department for International Trade has made much of that fact, but perhaps it should. That, combined with the record foreign direct investment into the UK in 2017, shows that something in our trade policy is strengthening our international position. It is imperative that we identify what that something is—what works in our trade policy while we are an EU member state—and look to continue what works after we leave the EU or replace it with something at least as effective, and preferably even more so.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that we need transparency about how we calculate duties, not least in the steel industry, where we could do with great transparency about how we calculate the level of dumping, for example?

Jack Brereton: I agree that it is important that we have a transparent and open approach. It is certainly important to ensure that there is transparency through an independent trade remedies authority.

Most pressingly, I seek assurances from the Minister that we will have effective anti-dumping measures which ensure that there is a level and fair playing field on which free trade can be played out. Our job is to embrace the opportunities of Brexit and use Britain's position as a leading member of the World Trade Organisation to push for free and fair trade globally. We need the same level and fair playing field globally that we pushed for on the regional stage of the single market as a member of the European Union.

Thanks to this Government, global Britain starts from a solid economic base, underpinned by a world-renowned and hugely attractive legal system with sound governance rules that has been hard built over centuries. The UK is a great place to do business. In a competitive world, it needs to be. I do not argue that we should

reinvent the corn laws—far from it. British industry must continue its efforts to be more productive and innovative. Although our modern industrial strategy will create an environment from which winners can emerge, it will not pick winners, and it will not prop up or bail out those who fail to satisfy their customer base, diversify their product range or provide the right value for money with products that are worth every penny of their competitive price.

I am hugely encouraged that manufacturing productivity increased by 2.6% in the fourth quarter of 2017, not just because that might be a signal that we are finally resolving the productivity puzzle but because it shows that the renaissance of British manufacturing and export success is, unlike what some people claim, built on more than the current low trading range of the pound. It is true that the lower pound helps with finding new markets in the short term, but achieving longer-term competitiveness will be key to keeping those markets and expanding them when exchange rates change again. Getting domestic policies right, keeping taxes and the regulatory burden down and getting skills and the entrepreneurial spirit high is every bit as important to our future trade as the adoption of remedial measures sanctioned by the WTO.

By getting both domestic policies and international rules right, and having free and fair rules-based markets guiding both, we can continue to boost the number of UK firms that engage in export markets. That is not just theory; it is happening in practice. *City A.M.* reported only yesterday that, according to Lloyds bank's latest business barometer, two in five businesses in the UK are planning to export for the first time or enter a new market within six months. The prospect of increased profits and turnover is the main reason why firms are looking to expand their business abroad. Almost one fifth explained that they were looking to export due to existing demand overseas, while only 13% were driven by exchange rates. There are big growth markets out there, and the Prime Minister is right to highlight and drive the amazing opportunities for trade across the Commonwealth.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate, but it seems to me that we are entering a global trade war, largely driven by the protectionist policies of the United States. Is it his view that domestic industries are better protected within the EU customs union or outside it?

Jack Brereton: I do not think it needs to be. We should pursue opportunities globally. As I said, there are real opportunities out there in the Commonwealth—and, yes, with the United States, too—to improve our trade links and the opportunities of trade for British businesses, such as those in my Stoke-on-Trent constituency.

We need more businesses to be confident exporters. For that, they need the right skills, the right support from DIT, the right trading opportunities and trade agreements negotiated by Britain in the British national interest. We need of course to ensure that, as a nation, we make full use of digital technology and use the internet as a worldwide exports showroom and sales platform. But we also need to guard against material retardation of the establishment of new industries in

[Jack Brereton]

the UK, either from barriers to entry due to costs or regulation here at home, or from imports that are unfairly and illegally dumped or subsidised by those who wish to nip competition in the bud.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate, and I apologise that I have to leave shortly to be on the Front Bench in the main Chamber. Does he agree that it would help to ensure free and fair trade if the calculation of dumping were stated transparently in the Trade Bill, which is due to come back on Report? That would give a lot more confidence to industries that need confidence, such as ceramics and steel.

Jack Brereton: As the hon. Gentleman says, there are a number of issues, and I will come on to more of them.

Looking forward to our global future, although there is necessarily some uncertainty about the final Brexit deal because negotiations are still under way, I welcome the Government's acknowledgement that free and fair trade must operate within a rules-based system and that options must be available for countering those who break those rules. That is to say that fairness means everyone playing by the rules—or, as Nigel Lawson once said, “Rules rule: OK?” However, those rules need to be clear, fair and consistent. If they are not, we risk pent-up grudges feeding economic nationalism, full-scale protectionism and eventual trade decline. I therefore hope that the Minister will give us additional assurances that will soothe industries that look for as much clarity and transparency as possible from the Government when making their investment decisions.

The British Ceramic Confederation, which is a founding member of the Manufacturing Trade Remedies Alliance, is keen to maximise confidence in the sector that the UK's framework for post-Brexit trade will be effective and open to the full range of remedies allowed under WTO agreements. Those agreements allow for three types of trade remedy: anti-dumping measures, countervailing duties and safeguards. I will focus on anti-dumping measures, because there are genuine concerns among BCC members and others that measures that the UK has previously actively supported may fall short of the proposed new economic interest test. Part of the concern is that it is not clear how that test would apply in practice, because, of course, it seems to be billed as something different from a public interest test; an innovation that goes beyond the public interest test in its calculations. Clarity from the Minister on that would be welcome.

Nic Dakin: The hon. Gentleman is being generous. On the point he is making, if we look at the systems of New Zealand, Canada and the US, we do not see additional tests. It would therefore seem perverse for the UK to introduce additional tests, which are not necessary in the best cases we see around the world.

Jack Brereton: The hon. Gentleman is right. Some of what has been proposed has not been experienced around the world; we will be testing something out that has not been tried. I will move on now, and I will not take many more interventions as time is short, but it would be particularly helpful to know whether the intention is that trade remedies would be applied before any test or only after the test. As the Manufacturing Trade Remedies

Alliance has argued, duties could always be refunded retroactively if any test found that trade remedy measures were not in the public interest.

Current trade rules have served the ceramics sector well against outrageous dumping by countries that have far less regard for the spirit of free trade and the necessary rules underpinning free market economies. For example, just 10 years ago, we saw huge volumes of ceramic tiles, giftware and tableware all made in China being dumped at a price that could not have covered the real cost of production. The investigations into those price anomalies found that they were such clear cut cases of dumping that the EU still imposes remedial duties today.

There are good reasons for maintaining those duties after Brexit. Not least is the fact that since the measures against tile dumping were introduced in 2011, employee numbers in the UK have increased by about 40%. Not every new job will have been created as a result of the anti-dumping duties—the economy recovered substantially and employment grew significantly across many sectors in that time—but it is clear from the evidence that anti-dumping measures underpin the ceramics sector's ability to take advantage of the Government's wider pro-enterprise policy agenda, giving breathing space for the industry to invest in becoming more resilient.

Indeed, as recently as 2016, an expiry review of anti-dumping measures in the ceramic tiles market found overcapacity in the Chinese industry equal to six times total EU annual consumption. The anti-dumping duties on Chinese tiles were therefore extended for a further five years. I hope that the Minister will confirm that those measures will apply at least for the rest of those five years once we have left the European Union. Similarly, in the giftware and tableware sector, UK employee numbers have increased by 20% since anti-dumping measures were introduced. Our ceramics manufacturers are currently preparing a complaint for an expiry review. If the complaint is successful, the investigation will take place while we are still in the process of leaving the EU, so for clarity the industry would surely welcome any indication the Minister can give that the continuation of any EU anti-dumping measures that might result from any expiry review will also apply in the UK market.

In addition, the ceramics industry is keen for Ministers to reflect on how difficult it can be to counter dumping if the definition of dumping is too narrow. Unscrupulous actors who seek to dump their goods will be unscrupulous in exploiting any loopholes they see. For example, it may not be appropriate to rely on the price in the home market from which imports come when those imports originate from heavily distorted economies—that is to say from countries where market situations are distorted by the interventions of the state, which is usually an undemocratic state working outside the norms of transparency and governance that we take for granted.

On dumping calculations, I am therefore eager to learn what view the Government take on ensuring that the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill makes it clear that there are circumstances in which the difficulty in determining normal value in the presence of state distortions means that provisions should be made for when it is not appropriate to use the domestic price. By clarifying how the Trade Remedies Authority would, in anti-dumping investigations, calculate the level of dumping for cases

in which the domestic price of the alleged dumped imports cannot be used, there will be legal certainty and greater confidence in the ceramics industry.

I also wish to raise the Government's proposed use of a minimum market share in relation to the acceptance of dumping—or indeed subsidy—complaints. I would be grateful for clarity on their intentions. Will a de minimis level be set and, if so, at what level? What rules for flexibility might there be in that level? For example, will there be flexibility if an industry has evidence that it is being materially retarded from achieving the minimum market share by dumping or subsidies, if previous injury from dumping has reduced an industry to the de minimis level, or if an industry plays a peculiarly important role in a particular area of the UK, though not across the UK economy as a whole?

As we leave the EU, almost everyone now agrees that the Brexit process should not be some sort of sharp shock; it should be a growing opportunity, with a smooth transition period in which to adjust to the new reality of global Britain. Will that transition include the retention of existing trade remedies for the ceramics sector, followed to their full course and renewed if necessary? Such an assurance from the Minister would be extremely welcome.

While the Department for International Trade will rightly be proffering carrots in seeking free trade deals for global Britain, in terms of opening access to the UK market, it should also let it be known that we will keep some big sticks in our trade policy array should tit-for-tat measures prove necessary. Brexit is a great opportunity for us to be a leading independent force in the WTO, and the champion of free and fair trade across the world. It will take time to convince all other members of our case, and in that time we will have to be ready to combat egregious distortions. However, the direction of travel should be clear: freer markets, freer trade, and an empowered and liberated entrepreneurial British spirit, with more of our world-class manufactured goods reaching global markets, all of it underpinned by a sense of enforceable fair play. That is the Brexit that my constituents voted for, and that is the direction in which I hope the Minister will be pleased to travel.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 5.45 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespeople no later than 5.23 pm. The guideline limits are: five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition, 10 minutes for the Minister, and two or three minutes for Mr Brereton to sum up the debate at the end. Until 5.23 pm there is time for other contributions.

4.58 pm

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing this timely and valuable debate. I am optimistic about the prospect of the United Kingdom having an independent trade policy after Brexit. That policy will rely in part on us having an effective trade remedies framework, as he mentioned.

The UK Government's call for evidence, which ran between November and March to identify interests with respect to existing EU trade remedy measures, was a

welcome development, and I look forward to the response. I doubt that the EU's approach to trade remedies has been entirely perfect. The UK can formulate a better policy, more tailored to our interests as an independent trading nation.

As my hon. Friend said, different constituencies have different issues. In my constituency it is very much about oil and gas, agriculture and the service sector. Trade remedies are important to my constituents and the businesses that create the jobs on which the constituency very much depends. We are concerned about anti-dumping policy, because agriculture and trading in commodities are particularly exposed to that risk. The EU's protectionist approach to agriculture has naturally discouraged countries from reducing barriers to agri-food from the EU. I hope that we can chart a different course, but we need to be careful that we open up opportunities with the rest of the world. The same goes for subsidies in agriculture, which is a heavily subsidised industry worldwide. We need a level playing field and we must be very conscious, if the EU carries on with its levels of subsidy, of the need to ensure that we do not allow that to distort our own agricultural output.

Oil & Gas UK has said that if the UK can get minimal tariffs with the EU and improved tariffs with the rest of the world, that could save the oil and gas sector £100 million a year. The sector will be worth something in the region of £1 trillion over the next 20 to 30 years, according to Oil & Gas UK's own figures. It is an absolutely enormous sector. However, free trade does not mean being a doormat. When other countries' subsidies go beyond what is reasonable and start threatening our industries, we should not be afraid to step in. Energy is a heavily subsidised industry in the rest of the world.

I will point out a couple of recent developments in the north-east, because it is important for our future trading opportunities and because I am conscious of the Department that is responding to this debate. I recently visited a social organisation called Elevator, which drives entrepreneurial opportunities, predominantly in the north-east of Scotland. The north-east of Scotland is the engine room of the Scottish economy, with 7% of the population and 15% of the economy. When the oil industry turned down in the north-east of Scotland, it had a huge effect on the Scottish economy and a significant effect on the United Kingdom economy. Many of the start-ups that Elevator is involved in are export-driven, and I encourage the Department to open an office—in Aberdeen, surprisingly enough—to develop those opportunities.

The global Britain opportunity is huge. In terms of future trade opportunities, it is important to note that the north-east of Scotland is a dollar-driven economy, where 60% of the service sector in oil and gas is exporting outwith the EU. The vast majority is outwith the EU. It has a target of doubling in size, and the natural areas in which it will look to grow will be the middle east, the far east and other oil and gas production areas.

Much has been said about the negative effect of Brexit and of changing our trading arrangements with the EU, but a recent survey found that over 50% of companies said they were not worried about Brexit causing a talent shortage. However, 33% were worried, so we need to ensure that we get the policy right.

[Colin Clark]

I look forward to better trading agreements on Scottish fishing. Norway already has a better trading arrangement with Japan and the far east than we do, and there is an enormous opportunity to develop, since 80% of fish from British waters is eaten outwith the UK at the moment. We need to have a seamless deal with Europe and to develop new opportunities in the rest of the world. Taking back control of our waters will necessitate new trading deals and opportunities.

I am optimistic about the future. There is a balancing act to be achieved, and I firmly believe that the UK Government can do it better than the EU, and have a tailor-made deal that works for Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom.

5.3 pm

Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) for securing this debate on future trade remedies. He is ahead of the curve on this issue, because amid the wrangling over Brexit we have rather overlooked the profile that this issue will have. I believe that it will become ever more pressing as we chart a new path beyond the EU. It is therefore important at this stage, as we draw up our Trade Remedies Authority, that we get its basic structure right.

As I have said before in this House, we are lucky to be among the first generation of politicians in more than 40 years to be drawing up our own independent trade policy, but that means we are also very green as a nation in fully grasping trade legislation and its implications. None the less, these are issues of enormous relevance to consumers and to businesses of all sizes in our constituencies. It is all well and good for us to be free traders in principle, but in practice many of those principles can be sorely tested when producers in our own constituencies are challenged by international competition. Indeed, they can be tested to breaking point when that competition is able to undercut domestic businesses due to the state subsidy or economic structure of their own countries.

My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about the capacity of Chinese pottery firms to undercut domestic industries, with a speed that can pull the rug from under industries that have been carefully developed over many years. Equally, however, cheaper products from abroad can be a boon to other industries, for instance by providing cheap steel for car manufacture, helping to retain production on these shores and delivering cheaper prices for consumers. These are not simple issues and they must be carefully considered.

As a member of the International Trade Committee, which has been closely examining the Government's plans to set up our own Trade Remedies Authority, I have been encouraging the Government to study the arrangements of respected trade authorities in other nations, particularly the US and Canada. Throughout the TRA process I have been concerned about the amount of power being vested in the hands of the Secretary of State, including over appointments to the TRA's board. I am also concerned about whether the TRA will be sufficiently skilled and resourced for what can be extremely intensive investigations.

In the US, the body responsible for injury investigations alone, the United States International Trade Commission, has several hundred employees. Given the difficulty that the Select Committee has securing sufficiently knowledgeable domestic trade panellists, we have a considerable recruitment challenge on our hands. As we leave the EU, there is the chance to produce a more flexible and responsive trade remedies model. UK Steel sees the EU's decision-making process as monolithic, with too much power in the hands of the Commission and a heavily politicised system. We have opted for an approach similar to Australia's, but in a recent Committee session one of our panellists expressed concerns that producer interests are beginning to take a much stronger precedence in that system.

I still believe that we would do well to consider the bifurcated model of the US and Canada, with subsidy and injury investigated separately to avoid politicisation and bias. With our TRA's chair and non-executive members all appointed by the Secretary of State, and with the Secretary of State retaining the ultimate say on the imposition of a trade remedy, I must confess that I am uneasy about the concentration of power in ministerial hands, given the prospect of a much more interventionist Opposition taking power.

Our new regime must be open and transparent, and have integrity and credibility. I therefore suggest that we try to take steps to ensure that the executive board of any TRA is open to independent scrutiny, perhaps through the Select Committee, rather than being only a matter for the Secretary of State to decide. I am sympathetic to my hon. Friend's concerns about dumped and subsidised produce, and the issue of transparency on the economic interest and public interest tests. Trade remedies are currently a highly political issue, and it is vital that our own desire to secure trade deals does not prevent us from imposing trade remedies if we need to in the event of dumping.

It is also necessary to flesh out the appeals mechanism for trade remedies. There is much that remains up for grabs, with a lot being allocated to statutory instruments by the Secretary of State, and details remain patchy. I would be grateful if the Minister could use his contribution to the debate to assure us further of his Department's progress in establishing a robust TRA in time for March 2019, if we are unable to secure the deal with the EU that we seek.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Lady makes a number of points that I find myself agreeing with. I am sure that I will get the opportunity to say this in my own contribution but, given what she has said about the Trade Remedies Authority being a transparent and fully representative body, does she agree that the amendments put forward by the Scottish National party and Labour, with the support of Plaid Cymru, to have representatives from all the devolved nations are vital?

Julia Lopez: I might be sympathetic to that, but there is a real concern that all those on the board of the Trade Remedies Authority should be able to rise above particular interests. Those particular interests could be strong industrial concerns in particular regions of the UK. Board members will need to be able to look at the UK as a whole and weigh up different arguments made to

them. I would have concerns about being very prescriptive about exactly who should be on any board. None the less, there needs to be independent scrutiny of the Secretary of State's decisions in making those appointments. On that note, my contribution has ended.

5.9 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I agree with other hon. Members that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) has brought this debate to the Chamber in a timely manner. I can only hope that the Government will bring the Trade Bill to the Floor of the House on Report also in a timely manner. We all await it with great anticipation and bated breath. Those of us who sat on the Trade Bill Committee had a good and robust debate.

I share some of the concerns expressed by previous speakers, and I know they are shared by several sectors and organisations. As the Member for Livingston, I represent a constituency that has been at the forefront of Scottish manufacturing. The Minister and I have worked directly and personally on some challenges in my constituency, and I pay tribute to the work he has done in his ministerial role. I cannot reveal the details of the company or the organisation involved, but I know him to be extremely hard working and willing to work across parties. While we may not agree on the current approach and wording of the Bill, I know that he shares my determination to support Scottish manufacturing and to ensure that companies that face problems when trading abroad are supported. I wanted to briefly say that.

I feel that, in a recent debate on the Floor of the House, the Scottish National party's position was somewhat misrepresented by the Secretary of State, which I am sure he did not mean to do. Our opposition was not to the notion of the Trade Remedies Authority—we accept that it will be needed, for the many reasons already outlined—but to the detail and the way it is to be set up, and the lack of engagement with the devolved nations and the lack of opportunity for them to have a say and to be represented. I take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) about special interests, but surely we in this place can recognise that many membership organisations are set up with representation at UK level and fair representation for each of the devolved nations. As we leave the EU, knowing the way that Scotland and other parts of the UK voted in that referendum and the importance of trade to our economy, surely the Minister recognises the importance of Scotland and the other UK nations having a permanent seat and a commissioner. To reiterate, the SNP position is to have a commissioner in the TRA and—very much in line with what the hon. Lady said, and about it not being a London-centric Whitehall Department—to have TRA offices in the devolved nations, and even in regions of England. It is only fair and right that we take a sensible approach. This is not something that I want to be seen as being party political about. The Minister and his Department should give that serious thought.

A cross-party, collaborative approach was taken to the UK Green Investment Bank. Its headquarters are in Edinburgh, so it takes a different view and a different perspective, and it takes talent and opportunity from

Scotland. We see that organisation invest across the UK while being outwith London. When we look at the TRA and the many challenges that face us post Brexit, devolving more power and opportunity to other parts of the United Kingdom is extremely important. I hope that the Minister will look again at the amendments we proposed—we will table further amendments on Report—and give them serious consideration.

The British Ceramic Confederation, which has been mentioned, has raised several legitimate concerns, and I hope that the Minister will give some more detail and indicate his views. One concern raised with me in a number of meetings with organisations and businesses is the lack of clarity and detail about the Government's approach and about putting meat on the bones of the TRA. That is something we all feel strongly about.

The BCC is concerned that there is no indication that the TRA will use any special methodology when investigating countries with distorted local prices. That is crucial, as China and Russia, where domestic prices are not decided by market forces, are the main dumping culprits. I know that dumping concerns us all. It would also be interesting to hear how injury will be calculated. Some of these are very technical terms, but the BCC feels it is crucial, as that is how the UK will set its anti-dumping duties because of the decision to adopt the lesser duty rule. It also raises the point of presumption, with the economic and public interest tests not being clear. It suggests that special consideration should be given within the tests to the need to remove injurious dumping subsidies.

ActionAid also gave me an excellent briefing recently, and I pay tribute to it for raising concerns about human rights and gender inequality. Those matters have been championed and challenged through the EU. I know that the Government always have warm words on human rights and on making sure that imported goods meet the highest standards, and I hope that that will be very much at the heart of the TRA and that it will take the opportunity to consider that.

I also hope that the Trade Bill will come back as soon as possible; perhaps the Minister will give a potential date. I would not like to press him too hard, but hopefully he has some thoughts on that. It is extremely important that we have clarity, because businesses are asking for it and want to know. In terms of the vision that he wants to set out, we have a clear view on Brexit and on the EU and remaining within the customs union and single market. However, as we set up these organisations, it is fair to say that there is an opportunity, in the sense that something new will have to be created.

There are major risks across all sectors of the UK and across all the devolved nations, and it is my firm belief that significant damage will be done to fishing, farming and manufacturing. However, the Government must be absolutely certain that, when setting up new bodies and organisations, those warm words are lived up to, that that promise of devolution to the devolved nations is taken as seriously as possible and that we are fully engaged in that process.

I go back to my point about looking at the amendments, having discussions and looking at the good work that was done on things like the UK Green Investment Bank. The Minister should give serious consideration to how the devolved nations will be involved in the TRA and how it will serve the nations and their sectors,

[*Hannah Bardell*]

because there is no doubt that the devolved nations of the United Kingdom have distinct sectors and deserve the opportunity to play their full part. I hope that he can give some hope and certainty to my constituents in Livingston and to businesses in my constituency, across Scotland and across the UK.

5.17 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). He made some extremely important points, which I shall touch on. I will also mention some of the comments from the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez).

Trade remedies are a key element of our future trade policy. Without adequate trade remedies, we will become the dumping ground for not only Europe but the rest of the world. That point was made to us by Gareth Stace of UK Steel when he gave evidence to the Trade Bill Committee. Trade remedies are the means by which we protect our industries and our economy—meaning producers and consumers. What that protection looks like is very topical, given the imposition of tariffs of up to 25% on steel and aluminium imports into the US—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South is not the only one struggling with his words today.

Those tariffs have been imposed by President Trump on the spurious grounds of national security. The danger exists that United States-bound steel will now be dumped in the UK instead, as we saw China do just a few years ago, which led to a crisis and the appalling news for the people of the north-east with the closure of SSI in Redcar. That is why an international, co-ordinated approach on anti-dumping is essential and why a common approach is needed to trade defence.

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing this very important debate. I want to touch on the things that my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) has just said about dumping. In 2015-16, when the steel crisis was a huge issue, there were 92 EU trade remedies and those covering steel were vital in stemming the flow of under-priced Chinese steel, but ever since, the Tories have pushed back against any new measures in the EU to defend our industries from that arising again. I would like to know whether the Minister will give some assurances, particularly at this difficult time in the steel industry's history, to reassure the manufacturers, the workers and UK Steel, which has been mentioned, that their industry will get the protection that it deserves and will survive the latest crisis.

Bill Esterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the intervention. I was about to make the same point. She is absolutely right to say that we need to hear from the Minister what his intentions are.

The EU does not want the UK to be swamped with dumped goods, whether that is steel, ceramics or washing machines, because if that happened, such goods could enter the EU market from the UK. Equally, UK businesses

do not want dumping, because it is unfair competition. Lack of protection in the UK risks thousands of jobs in the UK. It is no good the Minister's saying that it means cheaper goods for consumers—as I have heard him say on countless occasions—because the workers whose jobs are at risk are consumers as well. No job means no wage to buy the goods. A lack of trade defence is bad for producers, workers and consumers, yet that is what there has been far too often. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) is right to highlight exactly what happened in the steel industry, because when the Government failed to support EU trade defence measures against Chinese steel dumping and acted too late to intervene and save SSI, it was the Conservative group of MEPs, at David Cameron's prompting, who were the cheerleaders in the European Parliament against Europe-wide action. That included their blocking attempts to end the use of the lesser duty rule.

However, protection and the use of trade remedies is not the same as Trump-style protectionism. Trade remedies should be about the creation of a level playing field that defends domestic producers against unfair competition from dumped goods. They are an essential policy tool to correct multilateral distortions. Failure to use anti-dumping measures, in the name of free trade, misses the point that for trade to be free, it also has to be fair. Adjustments are needed in the event of Chinese or Russian state subsidies or distorted pricing of raw materials, or to address Trump's tariffs. The European Commission is due to vote soon on higher anti-dumping duties to tackle raw material distortions, so it is incredible for the Government to say, as the Minister has, that they will vote against those measures.

That brings us to the customs Bill—the Taxation (Cross-border) Trade Bill—and the Trade Bill. As the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) said, we should be debating the amendments to the two Bills on Report in the main Chamber, not having a general debate in this Chamber, but as we are, let us look at what the Bills will do.

The Government are planning to give themselves the power to decide not to act on behalf of UK industries, in favour of the consumer interest. That will be a political decision, balancing the interests of jobs in one area of the country against the interest of consumers—a point made to us by George Peretz, QC, when he gave evidence to the Trade Bill Committee. Trade remedies are essential to protect British industries, whether that is steel, ceramics, tyres, chemicals or pharmaceuticals. The Minister will no doubt say—he has said it before—that the lesser duty rule has been effective in tackling unfair trade. He wants to continue to apply it at the very moment when the EU is moving away from it, so tell us: where is the evidence to support that approach? I am glad that he is nodding, because I am looking forward to hearing his answer. Ask workers who used to work at SSI. Ask the MTRA. Ask industry and workers. They believe in strong trade remedies and they want to know the reason why the Government are taking a different approach.

The continued application of the lesser duty rule will see dumped goods diverted to the UK, and as we leave the EU, divergence in trade remedies will add to the damage done to the UK economy. The Minister is fond of saying to me and my colleagues that we are against

the creation of a trade remedies authority. He knows that that is not true, of course, but that does not stop him saying it. The difference between him and me is that I want the Trade Remedies Authority to be effective. I take seriously the importance of trade remedies in creating a level playing field for our producers so that they can compete in international trade in a fair market. That is why we tabled a reasoned amendment on Second Reading of the Trade Bill that stated categorically our support for the creation of a trade remedies authority, but we believe that the Trade Remedies Authority should be representative of all sides of industry; it should include representatives of producers, trade unions and each of the devolved Administrations. We tabled amendments to that effect in Committee, as did the SNP. In addition, the chair of the TRA should go through parliamentary scrutiny of their appointment, rather than being placed in post by the Secretary of State; Parliament should also have its say on the membership and non-executive appointments. I totally agree with the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster that the Select Committee on which she serves should be scrutinising all these appointments. The Government are using ministerial discretion in the establishment of the TRA before the legislation has been passed that sets it up, and the Minister should explain why, as ministerial discretion is usually reserved for matters of disagreement on spending within a Department.

British industry needs a strong, robust and independent Trade Remedies Authority that will use international best practice. Our amendments to the customs Bill and the Trade Bill will be designed to achieve the objective of giving our industry a level playing field. The Minister and his hon. Friends should support our approach or introduce their own amendments to do just that; otherwise, workers in the Potteries and many more across the country will face the possibility of the same fate as steelworkers faced in Redcar just a few years ago.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister would be kind enough to finish his remarks no later than 5.42 pm, that would give Mr Brereton time to sum up the debate.

5.27 pm

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing the debate. As you will know, Mr Hollobone, it is relatively rare, so far, for the Department for International Trade to be in Westminster Hall, so I welcome this opportunity to set out some of our proposals on trade remedies. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words about recent UK trading success, the record levels of investment and the UK's role in supporting the global rules-based system of trade, which is extremely important at the moment—it is important that we get that on the record right away.

I know well that my hon. Friend is passionate about his constituency and about defending manufacturing in Stoke. He was the first MP from the region to approach me, very soon after his election in June 2017, to talk about the importance of trade remedies to his constituents. He also introduced me to the British Ceramic Confederation, whose representatives I have now met three times in connection with trade remedies, as well as the Manufacturing Trade Remedies Alliance.

I also thank the other Members who have contributed to the debate. I will get through as many of the points that were made as I can. I thank them all for their contributions in a short debate—perhaps it could usefully have been longer. I will try to reply to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), even though he is no longer here, but first let me say a few things about the actual contributions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) made a number of important points. He of course is passionate about oil and gas in Scotland—as are we in the Department for International Trade—and about the capabilities and the future of fisheries exports from his constituency. We are working very closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to pursue that. I heard his call for a DIT office in Aberdeen. I can tell him that the majority of DIT's oil and gas team is based in Glasgow and spends significant time in Aberdeen. I agree with my hon. Friend that there are significant opportunities in the future. Only yesterday I was speaking to Wood Group, which, as my hon. Friend will know, is headquartered in Aberdeen, about the significant opportunities that the Commonwealth markets offer them, which he also referred to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) is an active member of the International Trade Committee. I gave evidence to her Committee—it must have been in early March—on the Trade Remedies Authority. It is a little bit early to say exactly how big this new organisation will be. We have yet to appoint the chair, let alone any members of it. However, I think an early indication of the sort of budget we are looking at is in the region of £15 million to £20 million a year. I referred at the Committee hearings to the size of the EU's operation, which is about 100 people working on trade remedies within DG Trade. That will give some early indication of the sort of size we are thinking about for that body.

I thank the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) for her kind words. We have worked together on two or three issues with companies in her constituency. I have worked for their interests abroad, particularly on recent cases. She and I have a constructive relationship. I will answer a few points she made upfront. We talked about representation across the UK during the Bill Committee. She will know that the important thing is for the up to nine members of the board to think about how trade remedies work right across the UK and not to be beholden to any particular nation, region, interest group or company anywhere in the UK, but to have an expert view on how trade remedies might work throughout the UK.

Hannah Bardell: I take on board the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, but I fail to understand why somebody from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland would be any less able to understand the distinct nature of the economies of their country as opposed to taking a wider view. The two need not be mutually exclusive. In the spirit of co-operation, and doing the right thing and what is best for the UK as a whole, why not have representatives and offices across the UK?

Greg Hands: I very much agree with the hon. Lady. It is perfectly possible and quite likely that of those nine members, one or more will originate from the devolved nations. The point is, however, that they should be

[Greg Hands]

appointed for their expertise in assessing some of these quite technical aspects, such as the determination of dumping, the calculation of injury and so on. The point is not to appoint them to represent a nation, region or particular stakeholder of the UK, but to have an interest across the board. She mentioned the possibility of satellite offices. I gave an indication of the likely size of the body.

Bill Esterson: I am puzzled by the Minister's answer, as I was when he said the same thing in the Bill Committee. I do not understand why he does not see the benefit of having a mixture of independent members, who quite rightly have the expertise that he sets out, and a number drawn from different interest groups. There could be a balance of the two to reflect the needs of the different parts of the economy and the United Kingdom.

Greg Hands: I feel that I have already answered this. We want a set of people who have expertise in the subject matter, rather than who come from a particular perspective, body, nation or region. That is the most important thing. Returning to the question of location, I think satellite officers would add cost, but I stress to the hon. Member for Livingston that we have yet to make a decision on where the location of the body should be. Again, that will be driven by where we can access the expertise that would be needed for this Trade Remedies Authority. I mentioned earlier that the Department for International Trade has placed a significant part of its operation in Scotland, for example through the oil and gas team in Glasgow, so as a Department we are not averse to placing something in one of the devolved nations of the UK.

I do not want to labour the point, but the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) goes on about his reasoned amendments. Mr Hollobone, given your long years in the House, you know perhaps better than anybody that when you put down a reasoned amendment, it normally means that you wish to vote for the reasoned amendment, because you wish to propose some way in which to improve the legislation, but you would not normally vote for a reasoned amendment and then vote against the Second Reading of the Bill. My point is that by voting against the Second Reading of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman showed that he disagreed with the central core of the Bill, part of which, of course, is to set up the Trade Remedies Authority.

This Government firmly believe in the benefits of free trade—I will come back to some of the other points raised in a moment—for consumers, earnings and jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South spoke powerfully about the importance of the ceramics industry for his constituency, which is a huge UK success story as an industry. Other hon. Members have spoken about their own local industries as well. Our manufacturers benefit from trade. Manufacturing makes up 8% of our economy, but most of our exports. I think we all agree that free trade does not mean trade without rules, whether product safety or IP protection; some of the most important rules will be our system of trade remedies.

WTO members are permitted to take action where their domestic industry is suffering harm as a result of unfair trade practices such as dumping, where foreign

companies sell their products in the UK for less than they are sold at home, or subsidies, which let foreign companies sell goods in the UK at a lower price than they would otherwise be able to. Members can also act in response to harm caused by unexpected surges in imports. In such cases, members can introduce safeguard measures to give industry time to adjust against unexpected surges in imports. Well-functioning trade remedies can level the playing field for domestic industry, by counteracting any unfair subsidies, dumping or unexpected import surges. They can also deter dumping and unfair subsidies from happening in the first place. It is important to have these first and foremost as a basic matter of fairness. Our industries should not lose contracts and our workers should not lose jobs because a foreign company has gained an unfair advantage. It would also be unfair if jobs were lost that could have been saved if only industry had been given time to adjust. That is why we are introducing a rigorous and robust system of remedies, which provides for the full suite of powers offered under WTO rules.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South raised points about existing EU trade remedies. He should bear it in mind that we have just finished a call for evidence on the existing EU trade remedies. That call for evidence closed on 30 March. The response was good. We will be looking at our response to that in due course. We have been clear that when we operate our own trade remedies system, we will transition those measures in the EU system that matter to UK business. We received over 70 responses from producers and other interested parties in that consultation. Most importantly, I can assure hon. Members there will not be one day when a UK industry that needs protection from unfairly traded imports will be left alone.

I will quickly answer the point made by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe about a transparent approach. The Government will use secondary legislation to set out the details of the TRA's framework. That is very important. Mr Hollobone, you will know from your years in the House that secondary legislation is not on the face of it particularly welcomed by legislators, but it is important in this case to be able to have a dynamic body of law that particularly reflects recent WTO case law, rather than write all of these details on to the face of the two Bills that are currently passing through the House of Commons. In particular this secondary legislation will include the different dumping methodologies and the level of remedy required to address injury to UK industry. We are meeting trade bodies in the coming days to talk about some of those details. In the future, the TRA will set out the way in which it has carried out its calculations in any investigation as part of a commitment to transparency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South asked about the de minimis threshold. At what level would an investigation simply not be taken on, because the amount of product produced in the UK was below a particular amount? If UK producers have a negligible share of the total UK market, the TRA would not initiate an investigation, as it would be unlikely to result in measures. For example, a company could be the only producer of widgets in the UK and therefore meet the WTO requirements to bring a case, but if that company produced a negligible proportion of the widgets actually bought in the UK—in other words, the total market

that is there—putting duties in place would have a disproportionate effect on the rest of the market, much of which would not necessarily be consumers, but could be other businesses and industries purchasing that product. That is why we will have a de minimis threshold.

In special cases, the TRA could choose to waive the threshold, which, by the way, we have not yet set. That would help to avoid a scenario in which an industry's market share is negligible precisely because of the impact of dumped imports, or in cases involving an emerging UK industry struggling to establish itself in the face of dumped or subsidised imports. I assure my hon. Friend that it will reflect a de minimis level, but there will be exceptions. The TRA will be able to overrule.

My hon. Friend asked whether EU measures will be transitioned for the full five years. We have agreed that EU trade remedy rules and regulations will continue to apply during the implementation period. We will assess which EU measures matter to UK industry, which the call for evidence that closed last month did, and maintain those measures at their current level until the TRA reviews them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon mentioned agricultural imports. Our trade remedies framework will enable the TRA to investigate unfairly subsidised imports where they are injuring UK agricultural producers and to take action where appropriate. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working on a safeguards regime for agricultural products to address the issues that my hon. Friend identified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster asked whether the TRA should consist of two bodies. There are, of course, always different views. There is not an exact parallel. We have looked at systems across the world, as she knows from the evidence I gave to the Committee. However, I believe that we are setting up the TRA with the right level of independence to allow it to reach informed and objective conclusions, which includes clear projections for the TRA's independence, impartiality and expertise. Other countries that use a single-body trade remedy system include Australia and New Zealand.

It is standard practice for the chair and the non-execs to be ministerial appointments. The other members would typically be appointed by the chair. That is the practice we have followed in relation to the Trade Remedies Authority.

Hannah Bardell: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: No, I am going to finish. I have perhaps not been able to answer every single point. Obviously, this is a matter for legislation that is still continuing its passage through the House. I hope that I have outlined some of the strengths of the trade remedies regime. We look forward to further engagement during the passage of the Bills.

5.42 pm

Jack Brereton: I would like to thank all Members who have taken part in the debate, and the Minister for his response.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) for his important responses about industries in his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) also made important points about the challenges of unfair international competition and the setting up of the TRA. I am pleased that the Minister has referenced the importance of the TRA's objectivity in the actions that it takes.

I do not agree with everything that the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) said, but I certainly agree with her points about the Minister. He is exceptionally diligent and very hard-working.

Hannah Bardell: I will just ask the hon. Gentleman this question, as I did not get the chance to make the point to the Minister. I think it is great that the hon. Gentleman secured this debate, but does he agree that we need to have the Trade Bill back on the Floor of the House on Report, to have a substantive debate and get more information on the Trade Remedies Authority as soon as possible?

I love the Library staff and their briefings, particularly when they are as direct as this one. In the "Comment" section, it says:

"The Bill establishes the TRA but says relatively little about its functions or the Government's approach to trade remedies."

I could not put it better myself. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that business and all the nations of the UK need more information on this as soon as possible?

Jack Brereton: The measures that the Trade Remedies Authority will set out will be set out in the customs Bill, so I encourage the Government to introduce that Bill as soon as possible.

I did not agree with everything that was said by the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, but I agree that it was Conservatives who previously put forward these points in the EU and were the strongest advocates for the current trade remedies. It is about creating that level playing field and not about protectionism. I agree with that.

I thank the Minister for his responses and the clarity he offered about the transitioning. I am very pleased that it will include transitioning measures across from what is in place in the EU to the UK's trade remedies regime. I also thank him for the clarity around some of the secondary measures.

5.45 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 17 April 2018

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Salisbury Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):

Following the indiscriminate and reckless use of a nerve agent in Salisbury on 4 March 2018, decontamination work is starting this week to bring a small number of potentially contaminated sites back into safe use for the people of Salisbury and its visitors. A lot of preparatory work has been completed already and these plans will now be discussed with the local community and businesses.

In total nine sites, three of which are in the city centre, have been identified as requiring some level of specialist decontamination. The focus will be on returning public spaces to full use as soon as possible, but only where it is safe to do so. The Government will work closely with both the affected businesses and the victims of this appalling act as detailed plans are put into effect.

In the case of London Road cemetery, after extensive investigations and testing, it has been established that it was not contaminated and is therefore being fully reopened to the public today.

The other sites will remain secured and the current scientific assessment is that the remainder of Salisbury is safe for residents and visitors. Public Health England have reaffirmed that the risk to the general public is low.

The community will begin to see more activity from this week and overall it will take some months before all sites are decontaminated and returned to normal use. During this time some cordons will be expanded to ensure safety and allow workers access to the sites with specialist equipment. This will be kept to a minimum wherever possible and the community will be kept informed as work progresses on each site.

The decontamination work is being planned and overseen by my Department with additional specialist advice from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Public Health England, the Department for Health and Social Care, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence. The work will be delivered in partnership with Wiltshire Council with support from the Ministry of Defence, who are providing specialist teams to carry out the work on the sites. In some cases they will be supported by other Government specialists or specialist contractors.

The Government are basing their approach on the best scientific evidence and advice to ensure all decontamination is carried out in a thorough and careful way. Thanks to detailed information gathered during the investigation and the clear scientific understanding of how the agent works and is spread, the likely level of contamination at each site is known.

Specialists have developed tailored decontamination plans for each site. To refine these plans, specialist personnel will be collecting additional samples from some sites, building on testing carried out during the

investigation. This information will be used to ensure the plans are correct and that decontamination will be effective.

The decontamination work will involve a process of testing, removal of items which could be contaminated and that might harbour residual amounts of the agent, chemical cleaning and retesting. All waste will be safely removed and incinerated and each site will not be released until decontamination is complete.

This work to bring the closed sites back into public use will go hand-in-hand with the £2.5 million already announced on 27 March to support businesses, boost tourism and meet unexpected costs in the response and recovery effort in the city.

[HCWS623]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Sir Tim Barrow (Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the European Union) will attend the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 17 April 2018 to represent the UK. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

The provisional agenda includes:

Reform of the Electoral Act

The Bulgarian presidency will discuss a Council decision to make changes to the electoral law governing European parliamentary elections. The presidency will ask member states whether they can support the proposal.

Rule of law in Poland/article 7(1) treaty of the European Union (TEU) reasoned proposal

The Commission will provide Ministers with its analysis of Poland's official response to the "reasoned proposal" issued by the Commission in December 2017.

Any other business—enlargement package

The Commission will present its annual enlargement package for the six western Balkan countries and Turkey, which is scheduled for publication on 17 April.

[HCWS622]

TRANSPORT

Greenhouse Gases: International Shipping

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): On 13 April the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) agreed a comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) from international shipping. The United Kingdom, led by the Department for Transport, played a leading role in the negotiations, pushing for an ambitious and credible outcome that would enable shipping to play its part in meeting the Paris agreement temperature goals.

The strategy is a major milestone for the shipping industry, which is now the first global sector to have set an absolute emissions reduction target.

The strategy includes:

A commitment to phase out GHGs from international shipping as soon as possible during this century;

A target of at least 50% reduction, and an aim for 100% reduction, in total GHG emissions from shipping by 2050;

A target of at least a 40% improvement in carbon intensity of ships by 2030, pursuing efforts towards 70% in 2050; and

A list of possible short, mid and long-term emission reduction measures with a commitment to develop a work-plan for implementation to deliver emission reductions before 2023.

The United Kingdom was at the forefront of a coalition of high ambition countries working with other member states, industry and non-governmental organisations to agree ambitious quantified emission reduction targets for the sector.

Countries will now, through the IMO, commence work on implementing the strategy. The UK, through the Department for Transport, will continue to work with other IMO member states, industry and civil society to establish what practical and technical steps need to be taken to deliver the emission reduction targets. A revised version of the strategy is due to be adopted in 2023.

[HCWS621]

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