

**Wednesday
20 June 2018**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 20 June 2018

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

GOSPORT INDEPENDENT PANEL

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a Paper, entitled Gosport War Memorial Hospital: The Report of the Gosport Independent Panel, dated 20 June 2018.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU

1. **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Northern Ireland political parties on the UK leaving the EU. [905862]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): I meet the political parties in Northern Ireland regularly to discuss a range of issues including the UK's decision to leave the European Union. As I have said repeatedly, these conversations are no replacement for a fully functioning, locally elected and accountable Executive.

Chris Green: As part of my right hon. Friend's discussions with the political parties, what steps has she taken to ensure good governance and stability?

Karen Bradley: During my discussions with political parties, I do need to ensure that we discuss a range of issues, such as the appointments that cannot be made in the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers. I am actively considering the issue of those public appointments, including assessing what action could be taken to address the problem. I will return to the House before the recess to set out my course of action in more detail.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): May I thank the Government for their engagement at the highest level with the Democratic Unionist party here on these Benches on a continuing and intensive basis? In the absence of devolution, it is important that Northern Ireland's voice is heard here, in the corridors of power. I ask the Secretary of State to bear in mind that Monsieur Juncker and Monsieur Barnier go to Dublin tomorrow and that

we are likely to hear a lot of harsh rhetoric. Will she encourage them to bear in mind the principle of consent in the Belfast agreement and its successors, and not to take a one-sided approach to this issue in Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: I have been clear, as have all Ministers in this Government, that we are committed to the Belfast agreement and all its principles, including the principle of consent. I hope that the political leaders that the right hon. Gentleman referenced have also heard that message.

Nigel Dodds: The Secretary of State referenced the absence of devolution. Of course, one of the issues is the absence of funding for the Commonwealth youth games in 2021. Will she look carefully at what might be done to bring forward funding for this prestigious event? It should not be stopped as a result of Sinn Féin refusing to form a Government.

Karen Bradley: I met the Commonwealth Games Federation last week and I am aware of the concerns about this matter. I urge political leaders across Northern Ireland to make clear their support for the Commonwealth youth games in order that the Northern Ireland civil service can release the funds.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): There is already a border, which is a tax border, an excise border and, as my right hon. Friend will know very well, a security border. The Government have made some very sensible proposals that whatever the final arrangements are on the border, there should be more authorised economic operators. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with local parties in Northern Ireland and parties in the Republic of Ireland about extending the use of authorised economic operators?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend is very aware of and knowledgeable about the border, having been my predecessor in this role as Secretary of State. I can assure him that I have discussed with all political parties—both north and south of the border—the matter of the border and the practical ways in which we can overcome the problems that some people put forward as being an issue.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The EU has been instrumental in helping Northern Ireland to address its legacy issues and in promoting economic development. What are the Stormont parties—or, indeed, the Government—saying needs to be done to address the deficiencies there once the UK leaves the EU?

Karen Bradley: Many people bear credit for the developments that have happened since the signing of the Belfast agreement and the economic development of Northern Ireland. I say gently to the hon. Lady that perhaps the fact that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom has more of a bearing on its economic strength than many other matters.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The technical note published on 7 June spoke of free trade agreements that could be entered into that would

not affect any temporary customs arrangements. What discussion has the Secretary of State had with the parties on specifically what form those free trade agreements might take and who they might involve?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade is of course responsible for those free trade agreements. However, my hon. Friend alludes to the very important point that for Northern Ireland, leaving the European Union as part of the United Kingdom means that it will have access to those free trade arrangements with the rest of the world and a land border with the European Union. That puts Northern Ireland in a unique, privileged situation.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): Brexit is the most fundamental issue that our generation faces. The voice of Scotland is heard through its Parliament and the voice of Wales through its Senedd; the voice of Stormont is silent. What urgent initiatives is the Secretary of State now going to take that will make a material difference in getting Stormont back to work?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is right. In the absence of a functioning Executive, the normal processes—the Joint Ministerial Council meetings, for example—do not have Northern Ireland representation. I am working, together with my officials and Ministers in the Department, to ensure that all Northern Ireland parties are fully apprised of the situation. As he says, the important point is that if an Executive were in place, a full voice for Northern Ireland would be heard in all the normal structures that enable it to be heard.

Tony Lloyd: But it is not just Brexit: there are many urgent decisions now piling up in Northern Ireland. Those decisions cannot be made by civil servants—the High Court has decreed that—and cannot be made by devolved Ministers because there are none. The case of Billy Caldwell is urgent enough for the Home Secretary to act here in England for the Secretary of State's constituents and mine, so what will she now do to make sure that Billy is not an unwitting victim of this constitutional crisis?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is right: there are a number of matters that are pressing. I have already referred to public appointments. I can also confirm that I will bring forward legislation before the summer recess to put the budget on a statutory footing for 2018-19.

The use of medicinal cannabis is of course a matter for the Home Office for the whole United Kingdom. That is why I welcome the decision by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to have a review of the use of medicinal cannabis. I assure the hon. Gentleman that during the whole of last week, officials from my Department were in close contact with health officials in Northern Ireland, and that, across Government, we pressed to make sure that the case of Billy Caldwell was dealt with with suitable respect and dignity for the little boy.

Northern Ireland Economy

2. **Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con):** What recent assessment she has made of the strength of the Northern Ireland economy. [905863]

14. **Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con):** What recent assessment she has made of the strength of the Northern Ireland economy. [905875]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): This Government are delivering a fundamentally strong economy for Northern Ireland, with unemployment down to 3.3% from over 7% in 2010. Nearly 19,000 new jobs have been created over the last year, the highest number on record, meaning that more people have the security of a regular pay packet for themselves and their families.

Rachel Maclean: Redditch has a proud history of manufacturing businesses that trade with Northern Ireland. One such business is Trimite, which manufactures specialist coatings for the defence and aerospace industries. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give to my constituents at Trimite and other businesses that there is a prosperous global outlook after Brexit?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the opportunities for United Kingdom manufacturers—those in her constituency of Redditch and those based in Northern Ireland. The Trade Bill will enable the UK to continue with existing trading arrangements, and that will provide certainty, continuity and reassurance for businesses such as Trimite.

Michelle Donelan: Companies such as Siemens in my constituency show an interest in and have an important stake in Northern Ireland. Has my right hon. Friend made any recent assessments of the economic impact of their remaining in the UK?

Karen Bradley: Northern Ireland benefits substantially from being part of the world's fifth largest economy, with access to an internal UK market of about 65 million people—the most significant market for Northern Ireland businesses, worth £14.6 billion in sales and supporting thousands of jobs. This Government have built a strong economy that can invest in services such as the NHS and deliver public spending. On Monday, I visited Omagh to see the Strule shared education campus, which is benefiting from £140 million of funding from this Government.

13. [905874] **Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab):** The uncomfortable truth is that production output in Northern Ireland has fallen by 5% and foreign direct investment has fallen by 50%—both being the largest falls in any region of the UK. Does the Secretary of State put that down more to her Government's complacency about the peace process or their reckless mishandling of the Brexit process?

Karen Bradley: The prospects and opportunities for Northern Ireland are absolutely fantastic. I am working to make sure that Northern Ireland benefits from all the opportunities that Brexit affords the United Kingdom.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): In welcoming the progress in the economy in Northern Ireland, does the Secretary of State realise that sport plays an important part in that? On Friday, the Commonwealth Games Federation will meet to decide whether Belfast will get the youth games. It is a small amount of money. Birmingham is

getting a huge amount for the Commonwealth games the following year. The permanent secretary has said no, so will she step in?

Karen Bradley: As I said to the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), I urge party leaders across Northern Ireland to make the views of the parties known, so that the civil service of Northern Ireland can make the right decision.

15. [905876] **Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): Investment in young people is vital if the businesses of the future are to succeed. What investment is my right hon. Friend making to support the young people of Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: I have just referred to my visit on Monday to the Strule shared education campus in Omagh, which is benefiting from £140 million of UK Government funding—funding that is only available because this Government are delivering a strong economy.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): We know that the greatest roadblock to economic growth in Northern Ireland is the lack of an Assembly being in place. That economic difficulty is being created because no decisions can be made. What measures are the Department and the Secretary of State taking to allow that to happen, so that we can go forward?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman will know that there is an appeal against the Buick judgment, which I think is what he was referring to. That appeal will be heard on Monday, and we await the outcome of it, but the Government stand ready to take whatever decisions are necessary.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The economy really will be damaged if planning decisions cannot be made. May I urge the Secretary of State to take swift action to ensure that planning decisions can be made by civil servants in the Executive if necessary?

Karen Bradley: I assure my right hon. Friend that we will take whatever steps are necessary in the light of the appeal that is due to be heard on Monday.

Leaving the EU: Border Policing

3. **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the requirements for (a) physical and (b) electronic infrastructure to police the border after the UK leaves the EU. [905864]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Shailesh Vara): Clause 43 of the December joint report makes it absolutely clear that there will be no physical infrastructure or related checks and controls on the border. As for the use of technology, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the details of a potential solution have yet to be worked out.

Stephen Gethins: I thank the Minister for his response. He will be aware that the Government's own assessment shows the economy being damaged by the Government's plans and that the least worst option is staying in the

customs union and the single market. Is that the case, or does he have alternative economic advice that he could publish?

Mr Vara: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's analysis. The fact is that the Northern Ireland economy is doing very well, with the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and exports are increasing. On the single market and the customs union, let me be absolutely clear: the people of the United Kingdom collectively voted to leave the EU, and that includes the customs union and the single market.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does the Minister agree that there would be no need for any kind of border infrastructure at all if the UK and the EU could agree what everybody wants, which is a comprehensive free trade agreement?

Mr Vara: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We need to have a comprehensive economic agreement with the European Union. That is possible, and I very much hope that all parties will work towards it.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): In recent discussions with the political parties in Northern Ireland, was the issue of the European arrest warrant raised? Will the Secretary of State come to the House and make a statement on the serious implications for the Police Service of Northern Ireland if the availability of the European arrest warrant were closed down to the Chief Constable?

Mr Speaker: In relation to the border.

Lady Hermon *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: Indeed. I am grateful for that nod from a sedentary position, which is very reassuring.

Mr Vara: I can assure the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke to the Chief Constable this morning about the European arrest warrant. We very much hope to have, as the Prime Minister has suggested, a UK-EU security treaty that will be all-embracing and bespoke. As the GCHQ director Jeremy Fleming said this morning, it is important to recognise that four European countries have benefited directly from our intelligence in the past year.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): With regard to the border, throughout Operation Banner and the troubles in Northern Ireland, the military and the police desperately tried to get a hard border between the north and south. We would blow up crossing points and the following morning they would be open again. With the automatic number plate recognition that we have now, there should be no hard border, and I cannot see how it could be possible.

Mr Vara: One of the dividends of the Belfast agreement is that we no longer have physical checks, along with security installations, at the border.

Security Situation

4. **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the security situation in Northern Ireland. [905865]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): The threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism continues to be severe in Northern Ireland, meaning an attack is highly likely. The Government provided the Police Service of Northern Ireland with £230 million between 2010 and 2016, and we are providing a further £160 million in this Parliament. Our response to terrorism and paramilitary activity is co-ordinated, effective and fully resourced.

Mr Jayawardena: I welcome what my right hon. Friend says, but how can it be right that loyal octogenarian veterans now have to look over their shoulders as a result of spurious and vexatious complaints in relation to allegations of which they have already been cleared? Is it not time for a statute of limitations to back our servicemen and women?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner for his constituents on this matter. I am sure he will agree with me that the current mechanisms for investigating the past are not delivering either for victims or for veterans. Right now, too many cases are not being investigated, including hundreds of murders by terrorists.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose—*

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I am glad that the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) has overcome his natural shyness and self-effacement. It is not beyond the wit of the Chair to call two DUP Members on the same question, and I hope he is heartened by that declaration.

Sammy Wilson: The Chief Constable in Northern Ireland has expressed some concerns about cross-border security in today's *Belfast Telegraph*. Will the Secretary of State give us some assurances about what discussions she has had with the Irish Government to allay the concerns that the Chief Constable has raised?

Karen Bradley: As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has already said, I have had conversations, including this morning, with the Chief Constable about these matters, which I also discuss with Ministers in the Irish Republic and other politicians there.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Some of those responsible for ensuring the peace in Northern Ireland during the days of the troubles are now being summoned to court again. Many of these individuals are suffering from all kinds of post-traumatic stress disorders and are terrified about going back to Northern Ireland. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that anyone called back to court will be wrapped around with a package that makes them feel safe and secure?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend, who has served in the Northern Ireland Office, knows a great deal about this matter. He is right that the current situation

simply is not working—it is not working for victims and it is not working for veterans—and that is why we want to deal with it.

Jim Shannon: With viable devices being found in County Down as recently as the start of this month, will the Secretary of State outline what discussions she has had with the Chief Constable to ensure there are sufficient resources and sufficient police officers on duty in stations throughout County Down to make sure that terrorists do not succeed?

Karen Bradley: I have had such discussions with the Chief Constable regarding County Down and all of the other five counties of Northern Ireland.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Further to the question of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), Michel Barnier has said this week that the United Kingdom could not remain in the European arrest warrant system post Brexit. What plans does the Secretary of State have to meet this concern, and to address the issue of the 300 additional PSNI officers for which there will be a vital need post Brexit?

Karen Bradley: As I have said, I discussed this matter with the Chief Constable this morning. We need to make sure that there are arrangements in place so that the way in which the arrest warrant has operated, very successfully, in Northern Ireland can continue.

Article 50 Negotiations

5. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When she plans next to meet the director of the taskforce on article 50 negotiations. [905866]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Shailesh Vara): There is regular engagement by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union with the EU's chief negotiator, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland hopes to have a meeting with the chief negotiator for the EU very soon.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. Will the Minister therefore enlighten the House about the timetable for publishing the Government's policy on the backstop for the Northern Ireland border, and as I say, with the discussions ongoing, will the Secretary of State discuss that with the chief negotiator?

Mr Vara: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we do not give a running commentary on all the meetings we have, but he should be aware that there is certainly a backstop and it will last until the end of December 2021.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I do not see any Member standing on the Government Benches—[*Interruption.*] Yes, there is. Mr Duncan Smith, calm yourself. I call Charlie Elphicke.

Charlie Elphicke: Does the Minister agree that threats from the European Union about having a hard border in Northern Ireland are simply unhelpful, and that what we need is co-operation in the use of technology so that things can continue to flow just as they do today?

Mr Vara: May I just say that the European Commission has agreed, in the joint report it signed in December, that there will be no hard border—no physical infrastructure on the border? It is also incumbent on us to make sure that the details of the Belfast agreement are met, which means ensuring that there is not a hard border.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Are any conversations going on with the taskforce with regards to the extension of the article 50 period? If so, will the Minister reiterate that that would be rejected totally and out of hand?

Mr Vara: As I said earlier, we will not be giving an ongoing commentary on all our meetings. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have the implementation period until the end of December 2020, and then the backstop agreement, but only if that is required under specific circumstances, and no more.

Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector

6. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What steps she is taking to help ensure the sustainability of the agricultural sector in Northern Ireland after the UK leaves the EU. [905867]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Shailesh Vara): I recognise how fundamental agriculture is to Northern Ireland economically, socially and culturally.

The Secretary of State and I are fully committed to ensuring that, as negotiations progress, the unique interests of Northern Ireland are protected and advanced. We want to take the opportunities that leaving brings to reform the UK's agricultural policy and ensure we make the most of those for our farmers and exporters.

Drew Hendry: Bagged salad, seed potatoes and beef are the high-quality products that make up around a third of Northern Irish farmers' exports. Those farmers rely on the EU for around 90% of their income, and they would see animal and plant health tariffs and produce checks as a nightmare. How can the Minister guarantee those farmers a future income and a market while also guaranteeing environmental standards?

Mr Vara: The hon. Gentleman is right: agriculture and farming is a massive industry in Northern Ireland. Some 49,000 people are employed in the sector and there are 25,000 farms. What I will say to him is that if we can get that overall economic framework with the EU through negotiations, the tariffs he refers to will not apply.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Mark Francois.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): At the second time of asking, Question 7, Sir.

Armed Forces Veterans: Legacy Investigations

7. **Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on legacy investigations into the conduct of armed forces veterans in Northern Ireland. [905868]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Defence about a number of issues relating to Northern Ireland.

Mr Francois: This House knows that, were it not for the bravery of the British Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, George Cross, there would never have been a Good Friday agreement. Yet the Secretary of State's proposals include legacy investigations into veterans—in some cases going back 50 years. Will she agree to give evidence to the Defence Committee inquiry into this matter so that we can ask her how her proposals are compatible with the principles of the armed forces covenant?

Karen Bradley: I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. Friend. As I said at the recent Police Federation conference in Northern Ireland, we owe all those who served an enormous debt of gratitude. Without the contribution of our armed forces and police, there would quite simply have been no peace process in Northern Ireland. I want to reassure my right hon. Friend that we are consulting on how to address the legacy of the past. This is a consultation.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Chester is a garrison city, and numerous constituents who have retired from the services are affected by uncertainty. I have no problem with crimes being investigated where there is evidence, but what comfort can the Secretary of State give those servicemen and ex-servicemen in my constituency who have served honourably and are living under a cloud of suspicion and uncertainty?

Karen Bradley: Those people are living under that cloud of uncertainty under the current system, and I want to see an end to the disproportionate focus on our veterans that is happening under that current mechanism. There is widespread agreement that the current system is not working. I urge the hon. Gentleman and all his constituents to respond to the consultation—we are consulting.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): An end to disproportionate focus is not the answer we need. What we need is for a line to be drawn, and the way to draw that line is to have a statute of limitations and a truth recovery process. Why has the Secretary of State excluded that from the consultation when it was supposed to be included?

Karen Bradley: I know that my right hon. Friend feels strongly about this issue. I urge him to respond to the consultation—I repeat, it is a consultation. There are differing views on this matter and differences of opinion, and we do need to hear from everybody.

Emma Little Pngelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Our armed forces and security forces served bravely and valiantly during the troubles. What action has the Secretary of State taken to ensure that no one who served is unnecessarily dragged into the criminal justice system for actions that have already been investigated?

Karen Bradley: Again, I urge the hon. Lady to respond to the consultation. We want to get this right. We want to make sure that we have a proportionate, fair and just response, but let us remember that 90% of all murders in the troubles were committed by terrorists.

Legacy Issues

8. **Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): What progress she has made on the consultation on addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past. [905869]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): The consultation entitled "Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past" launched on 11 May and will run until 10 September. We are determined to provide a better outcomes for victims and survivors, and to ensure there is not a disproportionate focus on former soldiers and police officers.

Mr Wragg: Even though it is absent from the legacy consultation, and further to the questions asked by my right hon. Friends the Members for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), will the Secretary of State reconsider promoting a statute of limitations so that veterans are protected from legal assault and are not hounded into old age?

Karen Bradley: There are strong views on this matter and I urge everybody who has views to respond to the consultation. There are a number of different opinions.

12. [905873] **Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): When determining the legacy of Northern Ireland's past, will the Secretary of State ensure that the wishes of the vast majority of people on either side of Northern Ireland are acknowledged? They draw a massive distinction between the perpetrators of violence and those who suffered as a result of it.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman makes that point very well. We do need to make the distinction that 90% of all killings were murders by terrorists.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905947] **Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 20 June.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Yesterday marked one year since the attack on the Finsbury Park mosque. That truly cowardly attack was intended to divide us, but we will not let that happen. We have been joined today by the imam of the mosque, Mohammed Mahmoud, and I am sure that Members from across the House will join me in paying tribute to his extraordinary bravery and dignity. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Friday is the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the MV Empire Windrush at Tilbury docks. It is right that we recognise and honour the enormous contribution of the Windrush generation and their descendants. That is why we have announced an annual Windrush Day, which will keep alive their legacy for future generations and ensure that we all celebrate the diversity of Britain's history.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Dr Whitehead: I concur with the Prime Minister's remarks concerning the terrorist attack on the Finsbury Park mosque. One year on, it is right that we remember it.

Following the agreements to which the UK signed up at the Paris climate change summit, will the Prime Minister now commit to a new UK climate change target of zero net emissions before 2050?

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom has been leading the way in relation to dealing with climate change. The United Kingdom was, I think, the first country to bring in legislation relating to it, and the Government have a good record in dealing with these issues. Crucially, we have ensured that we remain committed to the Paris accord. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), who played a key role in ensuring that the Paris accord was agreed to and that everybody signed up to it.

Q3. [905949] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Dorset is the home of the Jurassic coast, but my right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that it is not full of dinosaurs. [*Laughter.*] We are a modern, embrace-the-day sort of a county.

All my North Dorset constituents want to ensure the safety and dignity of women. As a husband and father, I do, too. Will the Prime Minister confirm that we will make the horror of upskirting illegal quickly, and in Government time?

The Prime Minister: I reassure my hon. Friend that I agree with him: upskirting is a hideous invasion of privacy. It leaves victims feeling degraded and distressed. We will adopt this as a Government Bill. We will introduce the Bill to the Commons this Thursday, with Second Reading before the summer recess, but we are not stopping there. We will also ensure that the most serious offenders are added to the sex offenders register, and victims should be in no doubt that their complaints will be taken seriously and perpetrators will be punished.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in welcoming my friend, Imam Mohammed Mahmoud, here today. He showed enormous humanity and presence of mind on that terrible day a year ago, when he prevented violence from breaking out on the streets of my constituency. I thank him and all the religious leaders in the local community who did so much to bind people together. As a country, we should be bound together in condemning racism in any form wherever it arises.

I was pleased that the Prime Minister mentioned the Windrush generation. I, too, join her in commemorating that event, when the Windrush generation arrived in this country. I hope that the hostile environment will be put behind us, and that we will take a special moment today to welcome a daughter of the Windrush generation as a new Member of this House. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) brings to this House enormous experience of dealing with the problems of poverty and dislocation in her borough, and she will make a great contribution to the House.

Today marks World Refugee Day—a time to reflect on the human misery of 65 million refugees displaced across the globe. There is a responsibility on all political

leaders both to aid refugees and to act to tackle the crises and the conflicts that drive this vast movement of people.

The Prime Minister said—[HON. MEMBERS: “A question?”] Thank you. The Prime Minister said that extra funding for the national health service will come from three sources: Brexit, economic growth and the taxation system. Well, there can be no Brexit dividend before 2022. Economic growth is the slowest since 2009, so which taxes are going up?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a number of issues in his opening question. First, I take this opportunity to say that when I visited Finsbury Park mosque after the attack, I was struck by the very close work that was being done by a number of faith leaders in that community. I commend them for the work that they are doing—they were doing it then, and that I know they continue to do it. We see such work in other communities, including in my own constituency of Maidenhead.

The right hon. Gentleman ended up by asking a question, I think, on the national health service, so can I be very clear about this? We have set out a long-term plan for the NHS. That is securing the future for the national health service. We have set a five-year funding settlement. That will be funded. There will be money that we are no longer sending to the EU that we will be able to spend on our NHS—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members may shout about this, but I know that that issue is not the policy of Labour Front Benchers. In relation to money that we are no longer sending to the EU being spent on the NHS, the shadow Housing Secretary called it “bogus”, and the shadow Health Secretary said it was a deceit. Perhaps I can tell them what another Labour Member said a few weeks ago:

“we will use funds returned from Brussels after Brexit to invest in our public services”.

That was the right hon. Gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am very pleased that the Prime Minister is reading my speeches so closely. I said that the money sent to the EU should be ring-fenced to replace structural funds to regions, support for agriculture and the fishing industry, and funding for research and universities.

May I remind the Prime Minister that my question was about taxation to deal with the NHS promises she made at the weekend. Last year—she might care to forget last summer, actually—she wrote in the Conservative manifesto:

“Firms and households cannot plan ahead”

with the threat of unspecified higher taxes. By her own admission, households and businesses need to plan, so can she be straight with people? Which taxes are going up and for who?

The Prime Minister: As I said on Monday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will set out the full funding package. We will listen to people and he will set it out properly before the spending review. I am interested that the right hon. Gentleman has now confirmed that the Labour party thinks there will be money coming back from the European Union. I think there is one circumstance in which there would be no money coming back from the EU: if we adopted Labour’s policy of getting a deal at whatever price.

Jeremy Corbyn: At the weekend, the Prime Minister said that

“about £600 million a week more in cash”

would be spent on the NHS. She continued:

“That will be through the Brexit dividend.”

Our net contribution to the European Union is about £8.5 billion a year, but £600 million a week is more than £30 billion a year. Her figures are so dodgy that they belong on the side of a bus. We expect that from the Foreign Secretary, but why is the Prime Minister pushing her own Mickey Mouse figures?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman thanked me earlier for reading his speeches. I suggest that he or perhaps his researchers spend a little more time carefully reading and listening to what I actually say. He claims that I said that by 2023-24 there would be £600 million more in cash terms per week spent on the NHS from the Brexit dividend. No, I did not say that. I said the following: there will indeed be around £600 million more spent on the NHS every week in cash terms as a result of a decision taken by this Conservative Government to secure the future of the NHS. That will partly be funded by the money we no longer spend on the European Union. As a country, we will be contributing a bit more. We will listen to views on that, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will bring forward the package before the spending review. If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about people’s taxation, why, when we increased the personal allowance, thereby taking nearly 4 million people out of paying income tax altogether, did he and the Labour party oppose it?

Jeremy Corbyn: Last night, the Prime Minister sent an email to Conservative party members telling them:

“The money we now send to the EU will go to the NHS”.

The Government’s own Office for Budget Responsibility says we will not see any dividend until at least 2023. The Prime Minister talks about a strong economy, but our economic growth last year was the slowest of any major economy, and it has already been downgraded this year. If growth does not meet expectations, does that mean—this is the question—extra borrowing or higher mystery taxes?

The Prime Minister: It is the balanced approach that this Government take to our economy that has enabled us—[*Interruption.*] Oh, they all groan! They do not like to hear that there is a fundamental difference between us and the Labour party. We do believe in keeping taxes low, we do believe in putting money into our public services, and we also believe in dealing with our debt and making sure that we get debt falling. What would the Labour party do? The Labour party would not have money to put into the national health service, because the Labour party would bankrupt our economy. And yes, if we are talking about the amount of money that is being put into the NHS, let us just look at what the Labour party offered at the last election. The Labour party said that 2.2% more growth for the NHS would make it

“the envy of the world”.

Well, I have to say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that I chose not to listen to that. We are not putting in 2.2% more growth; we are putting in 3.4% more growth.

Jeremy Corbyn: Under Labour the NHS increase would have been 5% this year, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirmed that this year there would be £7.7 billion more for the NHS. What is the Prime Minister's offer? She has promised £394 million per week without saying where any of it is coming from, apart from those mysterious phantom taxes that the Chancellor is presumably dreaming up at this very moment.

There is a human element to all issues surrounding the national health service and public spending. Let me give an example. Virginia wrote to me last week. She said:

"my diabetic daughter has fallen down on 4 occasions in the last month. She has both legs in plaster and is being told there isn't enough money for the NHS to give her a wheelchair".

The IFS says that the NHS needs 3.3% just to maintain current provision, which I remind the Prime Minister is at crisis levels. Does she think that standing still is good enough for Virginia, or for anyone else who is waiting for the treatment that they need and deserve?

The Prime Minister: We are putting in extra money to ensure that we see improved care in the NHS. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman what the chief executive of NHS England, Simon Stevens, has said of our announcement. He said:

"we can now face the next five years with renewed certainty. This multi-year settlement provides the funding we need to shape a long-term plan for key improvements in cancer, mental health and other critical services."

If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about what the Labour party does in relation to the health service—and that is where he started—let us look not at what it says, but at what it actually does. For every £1 extra that we spend on the NHS in England, Labour in Wales spends only 84p. Typical Labour: say one thing and do another.

Jeremy Corbyn: Health spending grew by 5% in Wales last year, rather more than in England. The Prime Minister's 3.4% is actually just 3%, as it is only for NHS England. There is nothing for public health budgets, nothing for community health, and, vitally, nothing for social care. That is less than is needed just to stand still.

After the longest funding squeeze in history, A&E waits are at their worst ever, 4 million people are now on NHS waiting lists, and the cancer treatment target has not been met for over three years. Nurse numbers are falling, GP numbers are falling, and there are 100,000 staff vacancies. NHS trusts are £1 billion in deficit, and there is a £1.3 billion funding gap in social care. The Prime Minister is writing IOUs just to stand still. Until the Government can be straight with people about where the money is coming from, why should anyone, anywhere, trust them on the NHS?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman why people should trust us on the national health service. Over the 70 years of the NHS, for 43 of those years it has been under the stewardship of a Conservative Government. Despite taking difficult and necessary decisions on public spending in 2010 as a result of the deficit left by the last Labour Government, we have consistently put extra money into the NHS. We have now announced a national health service plan that gives

it certainty of funding for the next five years, and, working with clinicians and others in the NHS, we will see a 10-year plan to improve services and to improve care for patients. The right hon. Gentleman can stand up here all he likes and talk about the Labour party's plans for money, but what we know is that the Labour party's plans would bankrupt this economy. The IFS has said:

"Labour would not raise as much money as they claim even in the short run, let alone the long run."

In short, its plan "absolutely doesn't add up": Conservatives putting more money into the national health service; Labour losing control of the public finances and bankrupting Britain.

Q4. [905950] Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Reports from the Health Foundation across our front pages this week conclude that millennials will face worse health problems than their parents and that a key cause of this is relationship challenges, yet only 31% of millennials say they had strong relationships and support networks while growing up. What action is the Prime Minister taking in response to calls from over 60 hon. Friends to strengthen family relationships?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for continuing to highlight this important issue of family support and family relationships, and we are determined to do as much as we can to support families. That is why we are providing for high-quality relationships education, helping children to be equipped and prepared to maintain healthy and respectful relationships in their adult lives. The Department for Work and Pensions is providing relationship support services to families through the voluntary sector, and, backed up by up to £39 million, the reducing parental conflict programme will help councillors across England integrate support for family relationships into the local services for families. As my hon. Friend says, and as she has said before, children who are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict can experience a decline in their mental health; we understand the importance of supporting families at an early stage.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister on the incident a year ago at the Finsbury Park mosque?

Many of us in this House will be aware of the deeply distressing audio and images of children separated from their parents in US detention centres. Infants as young as 18 months are being caged like animals, babies of eight months are being left isolated in rooms, and last night the former head of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement said he expects hundreds of these children never to be reunited with their parents—lost in the system, orphaned by the US Government. Is the Prime Minister still intending to roll out the red carpet for Donald Trump?

The Prime Minister: May I first of all say to the right hon. Gentleman that I am pleased to see him in this Chamber to be able to ask his questions? But on the very important issue he has raised of what we have seen in the United States, the pictures of children being held in what appear to be cages are deeply disturbing; this is wrong; this is not something that we agree with.

This is not the United Kingdom's approach; indeed, when I was Home Secretary I ended the routine detention of families with children. We have a special, long-standing and enduring relationship with the United States and there will rightly be a range of issues that I will be discussing with President Trump about our shared interests, and it is important that we make sure that when we welcome and see the President of the United States here in the United Kingdom we are able to have those discussions, which mean that when we disagree with what they are doing we say so.

Ian Blackford: I have to say that that is a disappointing answer from the Prime Minister. We should all be unreservedly condemning the actions of Donald Trump, and I ask the Prime Minister to do that. On the issue of immigration, while the US Administration call it a zero-tolerance policy, the Prime Minister calls it a hostile environment. We know that this Government detain children in detention centres here in the UK. The UK is the only EU country to detain people indefinitely. Will the Prime Minister today, on World Refugee Day, show some leadership and end her policy of indefinite detention?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the right hon. Gentleman's question about what is happening in the United States, I clearly, wholly and unequivocally said that that was wrong. On the issue of the detention policy here in the United Kingdom, he referred to the detention of families with children and, as I have said, we ended the routine detention of families with children early after 2010. We do, on occasion, need to detain people, but we take their welfare extremely seriously. That is why, when I was Home Secretary, I commissioned Stephen Shaw, the former prisons and probation ombudsman, to look at this issue. As a result of his report, we introduced the at-risk policy, which means that we have a clear presumption that adults who are at risk should not be detained, along with better mental health provision for them. We have asked him to go back and look at this issue again, and he has reported. We are carefully studying that report and will publish in due course.

Q8. [905954] Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Last year, the number of children in the care system in England rose to a record of 73,000, with huge social and economic consequences. The care crisis review, published last week, found that the drivers of that increase included a risk-averse blame culture and a failure to direct spending to family support. Will the Prime Minister ensure that her children's Minister considers the review's recommendations, and will she commit to ensuring that state intervention to remove children from families is used only as a last resort?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that care proceedings should be a last resort. They should be undertaken only after other steps have failed, because we want every child to be in a stable, loving home that is right for them. The sector-led review that she mentions is an important contribution to work that is being done across the family justice system to address the pressure caused by rising public law volumes in family courts, and we are carefully considering the report's findings and recommendations.

Q2. [905948] Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): If I can summarise what we have just heard: President Trump has locked up 2,000 little children in cages and is refusing to release them unless he is allowed to build a wall; he has quit the United Nations Human Rights Council; he has praised Kim Jong-un's treatment of his own people; and he has turned away Muslims. What does this man have to do to have the invitation that the Prime Minister has extended revoked?

The Prime Minister: As I said—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question was heard with courtesy, and the reply must be heard with courtesy.

The Prime Minister: First, I have just said in response to questions about the pictures and the behaviour that we have seen in the United States and about the way children are being treated, that is clearly, wholly and unequivocally wrong. On the wider issue of the President of the United States coming here to the United Kingdom, there are many issues that Members of this House—including the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—consistently encourage me to raise with the President of the United States. We do that: when we disagree with the United States, we tell them so. We also have key shared interests with the United States, in the security and defence field and in other areas, and it is right that we are able to sit down and discuss those issues with the President. He is the President of a country with which we have had, and will continue to have, a long-standing special relationship.

Q9. [905956] Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): Residents across Amber Valley are worried about proposals to build housing on land next to sites on which contaminated waste was tipped in the 1970s. Does the Prime Minister agree that planning guidance should be changed to make it clear that a thorough, competent assessment of the risks of contamination should be carried out before permission is given to build houses on such sites?

The Prime Minister: I completely understand my hon. Friend's concerns and have dealt with issues of contaminated land sites and development on them in my constituency in the past. We take local residents' safety seriously in relation to contaminated land, and we ensure that the guidance is regularly updated. Developers are already required to ensure that they comply with a host of legal and regulatory safeguards before they build on contaminated land, and we also require that they work in conjunction with the Environment Agency and meet building regulations to ensure residents' safety.

Q5. [905951] Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): The Government granted a licence to British Sugar to grow cannabis on an industrial scale and licensed medical cannabis produced by GW Pharmaceuticals. They have now stalled, proposing that a panel should decide on a one-by-one basis who can benefit from medical cannabis. I am wondering what will happen on day one when 20,000 people apply to that panel. Can the Government not see the writing on the wall? Will they move now to provide medical cannabis under prescription to the many people who would benefit?

The Prime Minister: I offer my deepest sympathies to those suffering from severe conditions where other treatments have not been effective and where cannabis-based medicines have the potential to help. I recognise that people suffering from such issues will of course want to look to alleviate their symptoms, but it is important that medicines are carefully and thoroughly assessed to ensure that they meet rigorous standards, so that doctors and patients are assured of their efficacy, their quality and their safety.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a two-part review yesterday. We see from recent cases that we need to look at this carefully, and the first review will be carried out by the chief medical officer followed by a review from the Advisory Council of the Misuse of Drugs. My right hon. Friend is also acting to set up an expert panel of clinicians that can advise Ministers on any applications to prescribe cannabis-based medicines.

Q10. [905957] **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Last Saturday marked two years since the murder of our colleague Jo Cox. Although she is no longer with us, Jo's legacy still lives on through the work done in her name covering many issues, including loneliness. I welcome yesterday's announcement of a £20 million fund to combat loneliness, and will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to groups such as Age UK and Brightlife in my constituency that do so much to tackle rural isolation?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in commending the work of the groups in her constituency that she referred to, such as Brightlife and Age UK. She is right that Saturday marked the two-year anniversary of the death of Jo Cox, but she is also right that Jo Cox's legacy lives on every day in the work on the issues that she cared about, particularly loneliness. I was pleased that we were able to announce £20 million to combat loneliness, and that will be used to help bring people together, to explore the use of technology to connect people in remote areas and to improve transport connections to make face-to-face contact easier. Jo was passionate about seeing a step change in how we deal with loneliness in this country, and we are determined to support the continuation of her work after her sad and tragic death.

Q6. [905952] **Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Thames Water and other water companies have profit margins close to 20%, paying out a huge £1.4 billion annually often to overseas owners that could be used to cut bills and accelerate repairs. Given that only Welsh Water, a mutual, makes no such payments, when might the Prime Minister get behind the efforts to double the size of the mutual and co-operative contribution to our economy?

The Prime Minister: There are many good examples of mutuals and co-operatives that operate in our economy, and they do well and provide services to individuals. There is no limit on the number of mutuals and co-operatives that could be set up. We want a mixed economy, and they play an important part.

Q11. [905958] **Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I have raised the issue of more beds for Hereford County Hospital

no fewer than 12 times over the years. Will she now confirm that the funding is in place to deliver those much-needed beds?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, he has been a consistent campaigner on this particular issue. We have announced over £3.9 billion of new additional capital funding for the NHS up to 2022-23, and the majority of that is to support the implementation of the local sustainability and transformation partnership plans. Major projects are under consideration across the country, and we intend to announce one large-scale scheme the size of the Shrewsbury and Telford plan every year going forward. They will be based on high-quality plans, but they will arise from local NHS leaders. It is important that such plans are driven by the local NHS, but they will ensure better care for patients.

Q7. [905953] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): It is said there is no greater pain than losing a child, especially in circumstances that are entirely and easily avoidable. My Slough constituent Mark Scaife, whose son Michael tragically drowned in the Jubilee river, was shocked to learn that schools are not required to teach water safety and the impact of cold water shock. Does the Prime Minister agree that, as we are currently in the middle of the Royal Life Saving Society's annual Drowning Prevention Week, now is the opportune moment to discuss this matter with ministerial colleagues and to announce the compulsory inclusion of these vital lessons?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this important issue. Our sympathies are with the family.

We take the teaching of water safety very seriously, which is why we are supporting the National Water Safety Forum's national drowning prevention strategy, which aims to achieve a 50% reduction in drownings by 2026 by encouraging people to stay safe while enjoying themselves. We have made sure that swimming and water safety is compulsory in the national curriculum for physical education at primary level, but we recognise there is more to do. We have established an implementation group, and we are reviewing the recommendations of the report, which is part of the Sporting Future strategy that aims to improve the swimming curriculum.

Q14. [905961] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): The Prime Minister knows that I, as the son of a doctor and a pharmacist, share her strong commitment to the NHS. Will she reassure me and this House that the additional funding that is being provided will lead to measurable improvements in patient outcomes so that this extra money is spent as wisely as possible?

The Prime Minister: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. We do not want to see money going to the NHS and being wasted or spent on bureaucracy, and not actually getting to patient care. That is why it is so important that, alongside the extra money, as part of the 10-year plan we will be working with the NHS on making sure not only that we see better outcomes for patients as a result of this extra money but that the money is spent wisely and in the interest of patients.

Q12. [905959] **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): After four weeks of Northern Rail chaos, passengers in the north of England have had enough. The Government have said that Network Rail did not deliver and that Northern was not prepared, but I have been handed emails from within the Department for Transport that show Ministers and officials were warned of impending chaos as long as two years ago. These emails are a disgrace. In them, officials describe key Northern routes as valueless, discuss “a classic handling strategy” for Members of Parliament, discuss whether to throw “a sop” to Northern passenger groups and debate whether to propagate myths in order to divert public attention from agreed planned route closures.

Will the Prime Minister explain to the House why she has withheld this key information from us and from the public? Or is she so incompetent that she literally does not have a clue what is going on in her own Government?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady refers to documents that she describes as having been leaked from the Department for Transport. No Government respond from the Dispatch Box to leaked documents they have not seen. In advance of the timetable changes for both Northern and Govia in May, a separate independent panel was set up by the DFT to reassure the Department about the nature of those plans.

Lisa Nandy indicated dissent.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady may shake her head, but that independent panel was set up, and that independent panel advised the Department for Transport.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that Birmingham airport will have 15% fewer international flights than otherwise, and that Manchester airport will have 11% fewer, Newcastle 14% will have fewer and Bournemouth will have more than 40% fewer, by 2030 as a result of Heathrow expansion? How do we help investment in our regions by suffocating the regional airports' growth?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend asks about expanding Heathrow and the impact it is going to have on regional airports, so may I just tell her one anecdote? When we made our first announcement about the in principle decision on the third runway at Heathrow, I went down to Cornwall and visited Newquay. People there were very pleased and welcomed the announcement, because of the ability it was going to give them to improve their local economy and expand their tourist industry, in particular.

Q13. [905960] **Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Today, 123,000 individuals will visit community pharmacies across Northern Ireland. As the Prime Minister knows, the pharmacies are the front door and shop window of the health service, so telling them that the best way to solve their problem when they have a shortfall of more than £20 million is to write to a defunct Assembly is not an answer to their problem. What is she able to do for community pharmacists across Ulster today?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the value of community pharmacies. I think everybody across this House recognises the valuable work they do in communities, and indeed

we have recognised it with our £100 million contribution to a health transformation fund. We have done and will continue to do what we can in the absence of an Executive to protect the delivery of vital public services. The Secretary of State's budget for 2018-19 addresses the key pressures across public services, including the Northern Ireland health service, and she will be bringing forward legislation to put the budget position on a legal footing. I know that she will be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss this issue further.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): May I join the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to the bravery of the imam from the mosque in Finsbury Park? May I also pay tribute to two people who are also in the Gallery today and who have shown dignity, bravery and integrity: the parents of Alfie Dingley? Alfie got the licence yesterday so that he will not have so many fits, which is what we know this treatment will do. I thank the Prime Minister and, in particular, the Attorney General for their input into this, but I want us to try to work with the family so that we can speed this up for other families. I know that is the most important thing the family want now.

The Prime Minister: I say to my right hon. Friend that I, too, welcome the parents of Alfie Dingley and commend them for the dignity they have shown in dealing with this difficult issue of ensuring that what they wanted to see for their son was available. As my right hon. Friend has said, a licence has now been issued, but it is right—this is the point of the reviews that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has set up—to make sure that our process of considering these drugs to ensure that they are going to be efficacious and safe for patients is not a long drawn-out one, because the length of process, as, sadly, Alfie's parents found, can be deeply distressing.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The European Union and Michel Barnier say that they do not want a hard border on the island of Ireland, and we agree with that, but in his remarks yesterday on security co-operation he seemed to be erecting barriers in the way of the best possible co-operation between the UK and the rest of the Europe. The *Belfast Telegraph*, in its editorial today, says that this brinkmanship by the EU is a boon to terrorists. Will the Prime Minister make it clear that that kind of approach is completely wrong? It appears that the EU wants to make Brexit harder for the UK but easier for those who want to cause damage across Europe.

The Prime Minister: The future security partnership we want with the EU is an important part of the deal that we are negotiating with it. I set out our intentions on that security partnership in the speech I gave at the Munich security conference. I fully recognise the importance of this, and in particular, of some of the instruments we have been able to use within the European Union, to the working of the police across the border of Northern Ireland and Ireland, and to ensuring that those who would seek to do the people of Northern Ireland harm are apprehended, prevented from doing so and brought to justice. I am absolutely clear that that security partnership is a key, important and essential element of what we are negotiating.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In the Gallery today are two young men from my Cleethorpes constituency, Callum Procter and Oliver Freeston, both of whom won seats on North East Lincolnshire Council at last month's elections. Oliver is just 18 years old and is perhaps the youngest councillor in the country. Will the Prime Minister congratulate Callum and Oliver? Does she agree that it is this country that provides the policies that allow young people to prosper and be successful?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to welcome Callum and Oliver and to congratulate them on their important success in the May local government elections. The fact that it is under this Government and this party that we see an 18-year-old taking a seat on the council shows that, as my hon. Friend says, it is this Government who are ensuring that young people have the opportunities to prosper and to pursue their hopes.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): The conclusions of the Gosport independent panel, which I set up with the Secretary of State's support when I was a Minister, are truly shocking, not only because of the fact that 456 people lost their lives following the inappropriate prescribing of opioids, but because there was a closing of ranks that prevented families from getting to the truth. Does the Prime Minister agree that there now needs to be an independent and thorough police investigation by another force? Will she agree to meet me and family representatives to discuss the report's implications? Does she agree that we must never again ignore families in this way and that there must be a mechanism whereby when allegations of wrongdoing are raised, they are investigated immediately, and that that mechanism must include the family?

The Prime Minister: My thoughts, and I am sure those of everybody in the House, will be with all the families of the patients who died as a result of what happened at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. The events there were tragic and deeply troubling, they brought unimaginable heartache to the families concerned, and they are a matter with which the whole House should be concerned. The right hon. Gentleman raised the way in which the public sector often, in his terms, closes ranks; that is an issue that we have to deal with across the public sector.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for establishing the inquiry when he was a Minister. I am sorry that it took so long for the families to get the answers from the NHS. I thank Bishop Jones and his fellow panel members for what they have done, and I would be happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman with Bishop Jones. This case shows why it is absolutely right that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been putting such a focus on patient safety and transparency in the NHS, because we need to ensure that we do not see these things happening in future. The findings are obviously distressing and deeply concerning. Of course, measures have been put in place to deal with issues, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement on the report shortly.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Peak hurricane season is due to hit Bangladesh and the Rohingya in the camps there. The UK is leading in the provision of aid to the Rohingya; other countries pledge aid but do

not deliver. What more can the Government do to put pressure on those countries that renege on their pledges of aid for the Rohingya?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important point: this country not only says what it is going to do but actually puts its money where its mouth is and goes out and helps people around the world, including the Rohingya in the circumstances to which she referred. We will continue to put pressure on all those countries that say they will do something but do not actually deliver the money, to ensure that they do.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I want to return to the broader context of the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker). This has been a chilling week for those of us from right across the House who believe in the values of tolerance and diversity. It is not just President Trump: Viktor Orbán has proposed a new tax on organisations that defend refugees and the Italian Government are targeting the Roma people. It is good that the Prime Minister said that President Trump's policy is wrong, but I want her to do more, and I think that the House wants her to do more. What is she going to do proactively to defend those values? What work is she going to do with Chancellor Merkel and President Macron to make it clear to the rest of the world and to the European Union that these other values, which are so inimical to our country, cannot stand?

The Prime Minister: We do work with Governments across Europe, particularly with the French and German Governments, on these issues of migration in relation to Europe. We expect all members of the international community to adhere to international law and commitments to human rights. As a Government, we oppose extremism in all forms, including when such extremism threatens to damage ethnic and community relations. We believe in the fundamental values of liberty, of democracy and of respect for human rights. We will continue to work with others to ensure that it is those values that are pre-eminent in everything that we and they do.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister's renewed commitment to the NHS is extremely welcome. Recently, the Health and Social Care Committee visited the Larwood House GP surgery in Worksop where, generally, all patients are seen by the doctors the same day. What more can the Government do to make sure that this best practice among GP practices is spread across the whole country so that all of our constituents can get in to see a doctor when they need to?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. One principle underpinning what we will be looking to the NHS to do across its 10-year plan is to ensure that the best practice that we see in many parts of the NHS is indeed spread across the whole of the NHS so that patients are able to get the access and the same standards that they need across the NHS. I commend the work that has been done in the GP surgery to which he has referred in his constituency. This is very important. I also commend work that is being done elsewhere to bring services together to ensure that patients see an improvement in the care and treatment that they receive.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The last Labour Government oversaw a 5.9% increase in spending on the NHS. The Thatcher and Major Governments managed 3.6%. So far, the Prime Minister's predecessor, David Cameron, and the right hon. Lady herself have managed 1.9%. Why, therefore, are we meant to be happy and amazed by her unfunded pledge to deliver an increase of 3.4%, which is under the annual average achieved since the NHS was first created?

The Prime Minister: As was recognised by the chief executive of NHS England, this is the funding that the NHS needs. Crucially, giving a multi-year funding settlement based on a long-term 10-year plan will give the NHS the stability and the certainty that it needs to be able to introduce the transformation that we all want to see in patient care. We will also ensure that, unlike what happened under the Labour party, this money will be seen in improved patient care.

Gosport Independent Panel: Publication of Report

12.54 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): This morning, the Gosport Independent Panel published its report on what happened at Gosport Memorial Hospital between 1987 and 2001. Its findings can only be described as truly shocking. The panel found that, over the period, the lives of more than 450 patients were shortened by clinically inappropriate use of opioid analgesics, with an additional 200 lives also likely to have been shortened if missing medical records are taken into account.

The first concerns were raised by brave nurse whistleblowers in 1991, but then systematically ignored. Families first raised concerns in 1998 and they, too, were ignored. In short, there was a catalogue of failings by the local NHS, Hampshire constabulary, the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the coroners and, as steward of the system, the Department of Health.

Nothing I say today will lessen the anguish and pain of families who have campaigned for 20 years for justice after the loss of a loved one. But I can at least, on behalf of the Government and the NHS, apologise for what happened and what they have been through. Had the establishment listened when junior NHS staff spoke out, and had the establishment listened when ordinary families raised concerns instead of treating them as “troublemakers”, many of those deaths would not have happened.

I pay tribute to those families for their courage and determination to find the truth. As Bishop James Jones, who led the panel, says in his introduction:

“what has to be recognised by those who head up our public institutions is how difficult it is for ordinary people to challenge the closing of ranks of those who hold power...it is a lonely place seeking answers that others wish you were not asking.”

I also thank Bishop Jones and his panel for their extremely thorough and often harrowing work. I particularly want to thank the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who, as my Minister of State in 2013, came to me and asked me to overturn the official advice he had received that there should not be an independent panel. I accepted his advice and can say today that, without his campaigning in and out of office, justice would have been denied to hundreds of families.

In order to maintain trust with the families, the panel followed a “families first” approach in its work, which meant that the families were shown the report before it was presented to Parliament. I, too, saw it for the first time only this morning, so today is an initial response and the Government will bring forward a more considered response in the autumn.

That response will need to consider the answers to some very important questions. Why was the Baker report, completed in 2003, only able to be published 10 years later? The clear advice was given that it could not be published during police investigations and while inquests were being concluded, but can it be right for our system to have to wait 10 years before learning critically important lessons that could save the lives of other patients? Likewise, why did the GMC and NMC, the regulators with responsibility for keeping the public

safe from rogue practice, take so long? The doctor principally involved was found guilty of serious professional misconduct in 2010, but why was there a 10-year delay before her actions were considered by a fitness to practise panel? While the incidents seemed to involve one doctor in particular, why was the practice not stopped by supervising consultants or nurses who would have known from their professional training that these doses were wrong?

Why did Hampshire constabulary conduct investigations that the report says were

“limited in their depth and range of offences pursued”,

and why did the Crown Prosecution Service not consider corporate liability and health and safety offences? Why did the coroner and assistant deputy coroner take nearly two years to proceed with inquests after the CPS had decided not to prosecute? Finally and more broadly, was there an institutional desire to blame the issues on one rogue doctor rather than to examine systemic failings that prevented issues from being picked up and dealt with quickly, driven, as the report suggests it may have been, by a desire to protect organisational reputations?

I want to reassure the public that important changes have taken place since these events that would make the catalogue of failures listed in the report less likely. These include the work of the Care Quality Commission as an independent inspectorate with a strong focus on patient safety, the introduction of the duty of candour and the learning from deaths programme, and the establishment of medical examiners across NHS hospitals from next April. But today's report shows that we still need to ask ourselves searching questions as to whether we have got everything right. We will do that as thoroughly and quickly as possible when we come back to the House with our full response.

Families will want to know what happens next. I hope that they and hon. Members will understand the need to avoid making any statement that could prejudice the pursuit of justice. The police, working with the Crown Prosecution Service and clinicians as necessary, will now carefully examine the new material in the report before determining their next steps, in particular whether criminal charges should now be brought. In my own mind, I am clear that any further action by the relevant criminal justice and health authorities must be thorough, transparent and independent of any organisation that may have an institutional vested interest in the outcome. For that reason, Hampshire constabulary will want to consider carefully whether further police investigations should be undertaken by another police force.

My Department will provide support for families from today, as the panel's work has now concluded, and I intend to meet as many of the families as I can before we give our detailed response in the autumn. I am also delighted that Bishop James Jones has agreed to continue to provide a link to the families, and to lead a meeting with them in October to allow them to understand progress on the agenda and any further processes that follow the report. I commend the role played by the current MP for the area, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage), who campaigned tirelessly for an independent inquiry and is unable to be here today because she is with the affected families in Portsmouth.

For others who are reading about what happened and have concerns that it may also have affected their loved ones, we have put in place a helpline. The number is available on the Gosport Independent Panel website and the Department of Health and Social Care website. We are putting in place counselling provision for those affected by the tragic events and who would find it helpful.

Let me finish by quoting again from Bishop Jones's foreword to the report. He talks powerfully about the sense of betrayal felt by families:

"Handing over a loved one to a hospital, to doctors and nurses, is an act of trust and you take for granted that they will always do that which is best for the one you love."

Today's report will shake that trust, but we should not allow it to cast a shadow over the remarkable dedication of the vast majority of people working incredibly hard on the NHS frontline. Working with those professionals, the Government will leave no stone unturned to restore that trust. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call the shadow Secretary of State—the Secretary of State made reference to this point in passing—I think that it is only fair to mention to the House that a number of colleagues whose constituencies have been affected by the events at Gosport Hospital are unable to speak in these exchanges because they serve either as Ministers or, in one case, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. It should be acknowledged and respected that a number of those affected individuals are present on the Front Bench. I am of course referring to the Minister for Care, the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinene); the Secretary of State for International Development, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt); the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman); and the hon. Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery).

1.3 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement. I welcome the tone of his remarks and the apology that he has offered on behalf of the Government and the national health service.

This is a devastating, shocking and heartbreaking report. Our thoughts must be with the families of the 456 patients whose lives were shortened. I, like the Secretary of State, pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), whose persistence in establishing this inquiry in the face of a bureaucracy that, in his own words, attempted to close ranks, must be applauded. I know that other Members have also played an important part, including the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), who is in his place, and the Minister for Care, who is understandably and properly in her Gosport constituency this afternoon. I also thank all those who served on the inquiry panel, and offer particular thanks for the extraordinary dedication, calm, compassionate, relentless and determined leadership—yet again—of the former Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, in uncovering an injustice and revealing a truth about a shameful episode in our nation's recent history.

As the Secretary of State quoted, the Right Rev. James Jones said:

"Handing over a loved one to a hospital, to doctors and nurses, is an act of trust and you take for granted that they will always do that which is best for the one you love."

That trust was betrayed. He continued:

"whereas a large number of patients and their relatives understood that their admission to the hospital was for either rehabilitation or respite care, they were, in effect, put on a terminal care pathway."

Others will come to their own judgment, but for me that is unforgivable.

This is a substantial, 400-page report that was only published in the last hour or so, and it will take some time for the House to fully absorb each and every detail, but let me offer a few reflections and ask a few questions of the Secretary of State. Like the Secretary of State, the question that lingers in my mind is, how could this have been allowed to go on for so long? How could so many warnings go unheeded?

The report is clear that concerns were first raised by a nurse in 1991. The hospital chose not to rectify the practice of prescribing the drugs involved. Concerns were raised at a national level, and the report runs through a complicated set of back and forths between different versions of health trusts and successor health trusts, management bodies and national bodies about what to do and what sort of inquiry would be appropriate. An inquiry was eventually conducted and it found an "almost routine use of opiates"

that

"almost certainly shortened the lives of some patients".

It seems that that report was left on a shelf, gathering dust.

I am sure that many of the officials and players acted in good faith but, taken as a whole, there was a systemic failure properly to investigate what went wrong and to rectify the situation. In the words of the report, serious allegations were handled

"in a way that limits the impact on the organisation and its perceived reputation."

The consequence of that failure was devastating.

To this day, the NHS landscape understandably remains complex and is often fragmented. How confident is the Secretary of State that similar failures—if, God forbid, they were to happen again somewhere—would be more easily rectified in the future? Equally, as the Secretary of State recognises, there are questions about Hampshire constabulary. As the report says,

"the quality of the police investigations was consistently poor."

Why is it that the police investigated the deaths of 92 patients, yet no prosecutions were brought? The report has only just been published, but what early discussions will the Secretary of State be having with the Home Secretary to ensure that police constabularies are equipped to carry out investigations of this nature, if anything so devastating were to happen anywhere else?

What about the voice of the families? Why did families who had lost loved ones have to take on such a burden and a toll to demand answers? It is clear that the concerns of families were often too readily dismissed and treated as irritants. It is shameful. No family should be put through that. I recognise that the Secretary of State has done work on this in the past and I genuinely pay tribute to him, but how can he ensure that the family voice is heard fully in future? He is right that we must be cautious in our remarks today, but can he give me the reassurance that all the relevant authorities will

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properly investigate and take this further? If there is a police investigation, can he guarantee that a different force will carry it out?

I also want the Secretary of State to give us some more general reassurances. Is he satisfied that the oversight of medicines in the NHS is now tight enough that incidents such as this could never be allowed to happen again? What wider lessons are there for patient safety in the NHS? Is additional legislation now required? Does he see a need for any tightening of the draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill to reflect the learnings from this case?

The Right Rev. James Jones has provided a serious, devastating, far-reaching service in a far-reaching report. Aggrieved families have had to suffer the most terrible injustice. In the next few weeks, we will rightly acknowledge 70 years of our national health service. The Secretary of State is right to say that this must not cast a shadow over the extraordinary work done every day by health professionals in our NHS. But on this occasion, the system has let so many down. We must ask ourselves why that was allowed to happen and dedicate ourselves to ensuring that it never happens again.

Mr Hunt: I thank the shadow Health Secretary for the considered tone of his comments. I agree with everything he says. Members across the House will understand that we are all constrained in what we can say about the individual doctor concerned—because that is now a matter for the police and the CPS to take forward—but we are not constrained in debating what system lessons can be learned, and we should debate them fully, not just today but in the future. The big question for us is not so much, “How could this have happened once?”—because in a huge healthcare system we are, unfortunately, always occasionally going to get things that go wrong, however horrific that sometimes is—but, “How could it have been allowed to go on for so long without being stopped?”

Reflecting the hon. Gentleman’s comments, the poor treatment of whistleblowers, the ignoring of families and the closing of ranks is wrong, and we must stop it. We must go further than we have gone to date. In a way, though, it is straightforward, because we know exactly what the problem is and we just have to make sure that the culture changes. The more difficult bit is where there were process issues that happened in good faith but had a terrible outcome.

In particular, this report is a salutary lesson about the importance of transparency. Obviously I had only a couple of hours to read it—so not very long—but it looks as though the Baker report was left to gather dust for 10 years, for the perfectly straightforward and understandable reason that people said that it could not be published in the course of a police investigation or while an inquest was going on. I am speculating here, but I am pretty certain that had it been published, transparency would have prompted much more rapid action, and some of the things that we may now decide to do we would have done much, much earlier. That is an incredibly powerful argument for the transparency that has sadly been lacking.

How confident can I be that this would not happen again? I do think that the culture is changing in the NHS, that the NHS is more transparent and more

open, and that interactions with families are much better than they were. However, I do not, by any means, think that we are there yet. I think that we will uncover from this a number of things that we are still not getting right.

As the hon. Gentleman will understand, it is not a decision for the Government as to which police force conducts these investigations. We have separation of powers and that has to be a matter for the police. One of the things that we have to ask about police investigations is whether forces have access to the expertise they need to decide whether they should prioritise an investigation. When the medical establishment closes ranks, it can be difficult for the police to know whether they should challenge that, and it does appear that that happened in this case.

In terms of wider lessons on the oversight of medicines and the Health Service Safety Investigations Bill, we will certainly take on board whether any changes need to be made there.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): The culture of closing ranks and ignoring whistleblowers in the NHS is gravely worrying. Even as a new MP, I have had constituency cases where people have alerted me to this, and I feel that it could still happen today. What implications will the report have for the wider health service, particularly for elderly care and people who have family members in these situations?

Mr Hunt: There is one very important point that the shadow Health Secretary mentioned that it is important to understand from this report. We very often have a problem where people in an end of life situation are not treated in the way that we would want for our own relatives or parents. To put it very bluntly, the worry is that someone’s end may be hastened more quickly than it should be. We have made a number of changes, including scrapping the Liverpool care pathway, which happened under the coalition Government. But in this case, these patients were not in an end of life situation. They were actually going to the hospital for rehabilitation and expecting to recover—but they were old. One of the things that we will have to try to understand—all of us—is how this could have been allowed to happen and how this culture developed. I am afraid that the report is very clear that, inasmuch as the doctor was responsible—I have to be careful with my words here—lots of other people knew what was going on.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement. There is much in it that I agree with, both in tone and content.

These are truly horrific events, and our first thoughts must always be with the families of those who have been affected by this scandal. It is deeply distressing to lose a loved one in any circumstances, and the circumstances in this case, with all the press coverage, will only have amplified that distress for everyone concerned.

When the inquiry was originally announced, it was expected to take two years, and it is extremely disappointing that it has stretched out until now. There has no doubt been a catastrophic failure of monitoring and accountability, not only with regard to the doctor concerned but those who failed to investigate these actions. The Government

are also included in this failure. However, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for issuing the apology that he has today, and welcome the fact that the Government will bring forward more considered responses in the autumn.

I sincerely hope that this will be the beginning of justice, and ultimately closure, for the families affected. I hope that the Secretary of State will support the opening of criminal investigations into the events following the report's findings. The public find it very difficult to have faith in health regulators who act both as investigators and prosecutors—and even the judge—in complaints. I hope that he will look at this aspect to ensure public confidence and faith in the healthcare regulation system in the future.

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and agree with what he says. Of course, if the police decide to bring forward criminal prosecutions, that would have the support of the Government, but the police must make that decision independently. If a family feel that an injustice has been done, who can they go to if they feel that ranks are being closed? I think we have made progress on that question, but we need to reflect very carefully on whether it is enough progress.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): The events at the hospital and the panel's report are of significant interest to me and my constituents, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery), on whose behalf I am also speaking. His constituents and mine have asked whether the families can be confident that the report's findings will be acted on and that people will be held accountable for what happened.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is right to ask that question. The best parallel is the Hillsborough process, which was also led by Bishop Jones. A similar report was published that put documents into the public arena, essentially enabling people to understand truthfully what happened. On the basis of that, inquests were reopened, criminal prosecutions happened and so on. We are at that stage of the process. I hope that the transparency and thoroughness of the report will give families hope that they are at last being listened to.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): May I first thank the Secretary of State for backing and trusting my judgment in 2013, without hesitation, and proceeding with this panel inquiry? I join him in paying tribute to the work of Bishop James Jones and the whole panel. Bishop James Jones is a remarkable man who has shown extraordinary clarity of thought that has, in a very impressive way, built the trust of families who have been involved in this process.

I am not sure that I share the Secretary of State's confidence that an earlier publication of the Baker report would have resulted in the transparency he called for, bearing in mind that I had to intervene in 2013 to stop a statement being made that there would be no public inquiry even after the publication of that report. Does he agree that we have to find a way of overcoming the problem of having different inquiries through inquests, through the police and through regulators, because, together, those stopped the vital information getting out into the public domain and stopped proper investigation

into these issues? Does he also agree that we need a mechanism to ensure that in future families are never ignored again, and that when legitimate allegations of wrongdoing are made, they are investigated properly and families are involved in that process?

Mr Hunt: First, I again pay tribute to the role that the right hon. Gentleman played. One of the most difficult things for any Minister is knowing when to accept advice, which is what we do most of the time, and when to overrule it. His instincts have been proved absolutely right. It is not an easy thing to do, and it causes all sorts of feathers to be ruffled, but he stuck to his guns, and rightly so. Bishop James Jones, who is a truly remarkable public servant, talked in the Hillsborough panel report about the

“patronising disposition of unaccountable power”.

That is what we have to be incredibly on guard against.

The right hon. Gentleman is right: at the heart is the problem that we did not listen to families early enough and we did not listen to whistleblowers inside the NHS early enough. My reason for saying that all these things need to see the sunlight of transparency much sooner is frankly that if they had come to light sooner and if proper attention had been given to this in 2001—we all know that Mid Staffs started in 2005—how many other lessons and tragedies throughout the health service could have been avoided? That is why I think it would be the wrong reaction today to say that we are getting there on patient safety and that transparency problems are solved: there is a lot further to go.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Within the last few hours, I have learned that I have a constituent whose grandmother had recovered from successful hip surgery without the need for any drug interventions and was sent to Gosport War Memorial Hospital for rehabilitation, only to be given a lethal cocktail of drugs that killed her. The matter was reported to Gosport police when it happened in 1998. Does the Secretary of State agree that if people are found wilfully to have administered lethal drug doses unnecessarily, they deserve to lose their liberty, and that if people are found wilfully to have covered up such crimes—for that is what they are—they deserve to lose their jobs?

Mr Hunt: I think everyone in the House would share my right hon. Friend's sentiments, but we have to let the law take its course, and we have to make sure that justice is done, because it has been denied for too long.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): On behalf of my constituents, I thank the Secretary of State for the apology and the statement today. Can he confirm that all families affected have been contacted and say a bit more about the support that will be available to those who have lost loved ones?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that. All the families who think they had a relative affected have been part of the panel process, and they were all invited for a briefing by Bishop Jones this morning in Portsmouth. We will provide ongoing support and counselling if necessary through the Department of Health and Social Care, which was a specific request of Bishop Jones. We are also conscious that when people read the news, they

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may suddenly decide that they or a loved one were affected by this. We have set up a helpline so that people can contact us and we can help them to trace whether they too have been affected.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Does not every instance of people being scared to speak out and relatives finding it too difficult to complain underline the importance of the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch, which the Secretary of State has established? I remind him that I am chairing the Joint Committee of both Houses that is carrying out prelegislative scrutiny of the draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill. When we report on 24 July, will my right hon. Friend undertake to bring that into law as quickly as possible? That will afford the safe space that people need to report such matters without fear or favour.

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. I commend my hon. Friend for his work and for being one of the colleagues in this place who have thought and talked about the importance of getting the right safety culture in the NHS. The Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch matters because in situations such as this, it could have been called in, done a totally independent investigation, got to the truth of what was happening quickly and prevented a recurrence of the problem. That is one of a number of things that we need to think about.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): Ten years ago, a constituent came to see me called Mrs Gillian McKenzie. She told me a story that sounded so far-fetched that I struggled to believe it. In her opinion, her mother and many other elderly people had effectively been killed before their time at a hospital in Gosport. I found it staggering. I then read the hundreds of pages of documents that this amazing woman, Mrs McKenzie, had put together over the weekend, and I came to the harrowing conclusion that there could be a chance of a significant number of early deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

I was a candidate then, not the MP. I contacted my good friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), and I took Mrs McKenzie and relatives up to London to meet him. He agreed that this could be something wicked beyond compare. Over the next few years, there was continual campaigning and lobbying, and continual pushback. Finally—I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend—we got this commission off the ground. By the way, Mr Speaker, Mrs McKenzie is now 84. I saw her on Saturday evening, wished her luck and gave her a hug. Twenty years later, we are talking about the deaths of more than 450 and possibly 600 elderly people. The relatives today got the truth.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have the very highest respect for the hon. Gentleman and for his keen interest in and experience of this issue, and I am exercising some latitude for Back Benchers and for the Secretary of State on this extremely sober matter, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman is at least approaching something that has a question mark at the end of it.

Stephen Lloyd: I am, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the latitude.

This has been a 10-year battle. Today, the relatives got the truth. The relatives and I demand justice. I urge the House, the Government and the police to do everything necessary to ensure that the individuals named in the report are brought to justice.

Mr Hunt: There can be no justice unless the truth is put on the table. That is the crucial first step, and now justice must proceed. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his campaign for Mrs McKenzie. Perhaps the best words I can use are these of the panel in the report:

“Yes, we have listened and yes, you, the families, were right. Your concerns are shown to be valid.”

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I echo the tributes to the work of Bishop James Jones and the integrity and diligence that he and the panel have shown in conducting this inquiry. The Secretary of State has rightly focused on the impact on families, and I was pleased to hear in his statement that there will be a helpline for families who suspect that they have been affected—not least because the immediate catchment area around Gosport includes a lot of retirement homes, and many families whose elderly relatives went to the area to retire may live some distance away. Given the publicity that the report has given rise to, a considerable number of people may need to get in touch. Will he ensure that the helpline is adequately resourced?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I will absolutely do that. I ought to say that I know my hon. Friend met many families and relatives during his time as a Minister in my Department, and he always dealt with those cases with a huge amount of compassion. The facts of the matter are, according to the report, that 650-plus people had their lives shortened, but we are in touch with only about 100 families, so we are expecting more people to come forward.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I, too, join in the comments that have made about the remarkable work of Bishop James Jones—not only in this important report, but on Hillsborough and on mediating with the Government last summer about moving the contaminated blood inquiry away from the Department of Health. I seek an assurance from the Secretary of State about the approach that Bishop Jones has put forward, which is the “families first” approach. Is there now a commitment from the Government to making that approach—families first—the hallmark of any inquiry that is ever held in the future?

Mr Hunt: I think actions speak louder than words. Such an approach is what Bishop Jones requested on this occasion, and we have done that. We obviously need to think through some process issues, because when a Minister wants to report to the House, they need to be a little bit informed as to what they are talking about. However, I think we have found a way to do that with this report and with the Francis report, so I think it is a good template.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May I commend the diligence and determination of the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), without whose efforts we would not be hearing the truth today, as grim and disturbing as that truth might be? Does my right hon. Friend agree that this raises further

questions about the way in which doctors' performance and patient safety are monitored? With the GMC, doctors are in effect policing themselves. Is it not time to say that this system has to change?

Mr Hunt: We do have to ask those questions, and we have to be able to respond to the concerns of my hon. Friend and his constituents about how we can be absolutely certain there will not be a closing of ranks. My experience, however, is that doctors are very quick to want to remove those of their number who are letting the profession down because this damages everyone's reputation. There are some very difficult questions for the GMC and for the NMC. Because their processes took so long, I do not think they can put their hand on their heart and say that they have kept patients safe during that period.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The legislation regulating both doctors and healthcare professionals is now 35 years old. It is inefficient, outdated and—as I know from a constituency case in which the individual concerned is into the fifth year of her complaint to the GMC—not user-friendly for the complainant. The GMC and other healthcare professionals want change and the Secretary of State's Department has already consulted on change, so will he give a guarantee that he will bring forward legislation to ensure that the system is not only effective, but effective for patients who make complaints?

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we have a regulatory landscape that is very complex, does not achieve the results we want, and forces regulators to spend time doing things they do not want to do and does not give them enough time for things they do want to do. Obviously, because of the parliamentary arithmetic, if we are able to get parliamentary consensus on such a change, that would speed forward the legislation.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): There are many "if onlys", but one of them is: if only the junior doctors and others who spoke up had been listened to. I know my right hon. Friend is committed to making sure that people and whistleblowers are listened to and that he is committed to transparency. Will he say a bit more about what he is doing to make sure that everyone involved in patient care—from consultants to healthcare assistants, porters, patients and families—are listened to and that their concerns are acted on?

Mr Hunt: I think we have made progress when it comes to whistleblowing because every trust now has a "freedom to speak up" guardian—an independent person inside the trust whom clinicians can contact if they have patient safety concerns. That is a big step forward, which was recommended by Robert Francis. Where I am less clear that we have solved the problem is in relation to having someone for families to go to if they think that everyone is closing ranks, and we now need to reflect on that.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my history of working in the NHS.

A brave nurse came forward all those many years ago to highlight a concern, but the concern was not taken forward adequately at that time. Often in these

circumstances, the NHS closes ranks, management remove the individual who raises the concern—the clinician in this instance—and allows the system to continue. Is there some way of monitoring the types of concerns raised by clinicians, ensuring that the staff who raise these concerns are not themselves penalised and that the system then takes accountability forward?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that matter. The nurse concerned, Anita Tubbritt, talks in the report about her concerns and the pressure that she was put under, and it was a brave thing to do. When the hon. Lady reads the report, she will see that nurse auxiliaries and others who were not professionally trained clinicians also came forward with concerns and were also worried about the impact that doing so would have on their own career. That is what we have got to stop because, in whatever part of the UK, getting a culture in which people can speak openly about patient safety issues is absolutely essential.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I was a junior doctor at the Royal Hospital Haslar in Gosport, which is just around the corner from the Gosport War Memorial Hospital, so I know that hospital fairly well, and I also know that the people of Gosport will be disappointed and distressed by this, since they very much value their community hospital.

Does the Secretary of State agree with me that there is an issue about the governance of smaller institutions, as we have seen in the past? I in no way wish to disparage the excellent work done by community hospitals, of which I have been a champion for many years, but will he look specifically at the pages in the report that touch on this? There is an issue about governing and ensuring safety in small institutions—whether in general practice or in hospitals?

Mr Hunt: I think that that is actually an excellent point, and we should definitely look at it. Big hospitals have clear lines of accountability—boards, chief executives—but those often do not exist in community hospitals and there is no one who can say they are the boss of that trust, so we should look at that.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The grandmother of one of my constituents died in Gosport War Memorial Hospital in January 1999—in other words, after concerns were being raised by families and by staff at the hospital. The family believe that her morphine dose was well above that needed for her reported pain. I thank the Health Secretary for the tone of his statement, and I also thank Bishop Jones for the work he did on this inquiry. Does the Secretary of State believe that this report shows a need for tightening the draft Health Service Safety Investigations Bill?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. I do not want to jump to a conclusion about any changes to the draft Bill. However, we should definitely reflect on any legislative changes that might be needed as a result of this report, and that Bill could be a very powerful vehicle for doing so.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned trust, and as a doctor myself, I am very aware of and humbled by the fact that people come to me with their children and

[Dr Caroline Johnson]

put their trust in me to look after them. When events such as this occur, trusts can be shaken, and it is therefore important that these things are dealt with quickly. In this case, the investigation, since complaints were first received, has been going on for far too long. What will my right hon. Friend do to reassure people that any such complaints will be dealt with much more quickly in future, and that opportunities to save lives will not be lost in the meantime?

Mr Hunt: That is the big question we have to answer for both the House and the British people. However, I would say to the hon. Lady that I am confident that, where there is unsafe practice, it is surfaced much more quickly now in the NHS than it has been in the past. I am less confident about whether we have removed the bureaucratic obstacles that mean the processes of doing such investigations are not delayed inordinately so that the broader lessons that need to be learned can be learned.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): One of the reasons for the growing success of the “Getting it right first time” programme is the creation of clinician-agreed datasets. Will the Secretary of State give the House an assurance that there will in future be proper analysis of the data on the excess number of deaths and the use of this particular type of drug in excessive amounts? Such analysis would have shown this hospital as an outlier, so questions could have been asked, as is now happening successfully with the GIRFT programme.

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his championing of the GIRFT programme, which is incredibly powerful and successful. He will have noticed that we announced last week that we are expanding it into a national clinical information programme, which will cover more than 70% of consultants. What is disturbing in this case, though, if I may say so, is that the data was really around mortality, and we have actually had that data for this whole period. There is really nothing to stop anyone looking at data, and we can see a spike in the mortality rates in this hospital between 1997 and 2001. They go down dramatically in 2001, when the practices around opiates were changed. That is why we have to ask ourselves the very difficult question about why no one looked at that data or, if they did, why no one did anything about it.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Will the Secretary of State commit to look at the wider structural issues that affect patient safety, and particularly at things such as staffing levels and pressures on doctors and nurses?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. One of the big lessons from this report is that we have to look at systemic issues as much as at the practice of an individual doctor or nurse.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for getting us to this point. I was deeply concerned to hear in the Secretary of State’s statement that Ministers had been given advice not to proceed with this independent panel. Is the Secretary of State convinced that Ministers are now receiving better advice?

Mr Hunt: Of course that is an issue that we will look into. I would just say, in the interests of transparency, that the Department of Health has been on the same journey as the whole of the rest of the NHS with respect to patient safety issues.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that this report highlights the importance of the CQC to the NHS and patient safety? Will he consider giving that body greater regulatory powers?

Mr Hunt: The legal independence of the CQC, and its ability to act as the nation’s whistleblower-in-chief, is one of the big, important reforms of recent years, and I think that will give the public confidence. However, I do not think that that is the entire answer, and I still think there is an issue about who families go to when they think they are being ignored by the establishment.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): We have had Mid Staffs, Morecambe Bay and now the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. That tells us that significant patient failures are not one-offs; indeed, the Francis report of 2013 was one of the most challenging public documents I have ever read. My right hon. Friend has made patient safety a personal priority, with his customary judgment and compassion. Can he confirm that this developing culture within the NHS remains a priority for him and that the NHS will do all that it can to protect the most frail and vulnerable that it looks after?

Mr Hunt: That is absolutely my priority, and my hon. Friend worked very closely with me on that when he was my Parliamentary Private Secretary. Changing culture is a long, long process, but I think we can start through some of the things we do in this House. Reacting afresh to this report, and not just saying, “We’ve done what we need to do, because we had Mid Staffs and Morecambe Bay,” is a very important next step.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): For me, the two most shocking things are the number of deaths and the length of time it has taken for this scandal to be exposed. Further to the earlier question, until the Secretary of State overruled it, the official advice from the Department of Health was that this public inquiry should not take place. Is there going to be an official investigation into why that official advice was given and which civil servant should be held accountable for it?

Mr Hunt: We will, of course, look at that. That was why I said in my statement that there were failures by the Department of Health—the specific incident needs to be looked at—and also as the steward of the system in which so many other things went wrong.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that all deaths in the NHS will be properly assessed by a coroner or a medical examiner so that lessons can be learned and avoidable deaths minimised?

Mr Hunt: I can confirm that, from next April, all hospital deaths will be examined by an independent doctor—this is the medical examiner process. We are expanding the learning from deaths programme to primary care. That is exactly where we want to go.

Points of Order

1.44 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This month is Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, yet as we celebrate the distinct and important contribution of our Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community—an ancient history across these islands—one of our closest allies, through the office of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Italy, is systematically targeting the Roma community of Italy. Can you advise Members how the House can express its utter dismay that one of our close allies is targeting one of Europe's most distinct communities, and one of its most vulnerable, in such a heinous fashion?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice that he wished to put it. The matter will be of concern to hon. and right hon. Members across the House. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the matter was raised in questions to the Prime Minister. I am confident that Members of this House—the hon. Gentleman included—will continue to find ways to express their opposition to these developments and, as they think fit, and if appropriate, to press the Government for action or representations on the matter.

More specifically, in so far as the hon. Gentleman in his point of order inquired what a Member could do to flag up concern, the answer is that, beyond statements in the Chamber and the opportunities that might be presented by debate, hon. Members are perfectly at liberty to table and sign early-day motions. I think the hon. Gentleman will require no further information or encouragement than I have already provided.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Wednesday, in a debate I called in Westminster Hall, the Minister for Immigration responded on the Home Office's treatment of highly skilled migrants by saying:

"no applicants have been successful at judicial review, and...38 appeals have been allowed, mostly on human rights grounds."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 420WH.]

First, my understanding is that appeals can be allowed only on human rights grounds under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998. More worryingly, several sources have been in touch with me to say that people have been successful at judicial review, either because the Home Office decision has been overturned, or because the Home Office settled via a consent order and then granted indefinite leave to remain.

I am very concerned that the Minister for Immigration has misled the House in Westminster Hall, either through omission or through deliberate misuse of a statement. Would she be able to bring this to the House—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must not suggest that a Minister has, by calculation, misled either this Chamber or Westminster Hall. If she wants to suggest that there might have been inadvertence involved, that would be orderly, and then she can conclude, very safely, her point of order. I think that would be best.

Alison Thewliss: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The Minister may have inadvertently misled the House, but she certainly read from a prepared statement to

Westminster Hall, as far as I could ascertain. I think it would be useful if the Minister could come to the House to explain the statement that she made last week, because it is deeply concerning that while people have quite clearly won at judicial review, the Minister either did not know that or did not share it with the House.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. The short answer is that every Member of this House is responsible for the veracity of what he or she says to it. That includes Ministers. If a Minister feels that he or she has erred—and to err is human—and has inadvertently given incorrect information to the House, it is open to, and it would I think be thought incumbent upon, that Member to correct the record. It is not for me to act as arbiter of whether that is required, but the hon. Lady, who is now a relatively experienced and certainly a very dextrous Member of the House, has found the means to register her concern. I feel sure that that concern will be communicated to the relevant occupant of the Treasury Bench ere long. As to what then happens, we await events.

If there are no further—[*Interruption.*] Yes, I am coming to that. I am extremely grateful to the Clerk, who is very on the ball as always, for his procedural expertise. I was just going to say that if there are no further points of order on other matters, we come now to the point of order from Mr Craig Mackinlay.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to make an apology to the House. In 2001—some 17 years ago—I incorporated a company, Mama Airlines Ltd, on the back of a business idea: the potential for a low-cost airline, with Manston to Malaga a possible route. The company has never traded, has never had a bank account, and has 2p of share capital that I own. That is the entirety of its balance sheet. I have never received reward or remuneration of any kind. It was an idea of its day and, following the tragedy of 9/11, it never came to anything and plans ceased.

It remains a dormant company and, personally, I have never had any subsequent thoughts of creating an airline, nor of using the registered company for any other activity. I had not considered, under any common-sense interpretation of the rules, that such a shareholding of 2p in a dormant company that has never traded would require registration under the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I was wrong to rely on common sense, as there is no de minimis value threshold once the 15% shareholding limit has been reached.

This business idea is no secret, Mr Speaker. I mention the fact with some pride on public platforms, in the local press, in election literature and to whoever will listen. I would be surprised if there was anyone in South Thanet who was unaware of this long-past business idea. Not surprisingly, Manston airport is a relevant local issue, and I will continue to speak up for an aviation future for Manston, which would bring with it jobs and investment to east Kent.

The registration of my interest will now be recorded appropriately in the Register of Members' Financial Interests under the rectification procedure. The interest should have been registered from 8 May 2015. Given the registrable interest, it also becomes a declarable one. It would now appear that, under the rules, my shareholding

[Craig Mackinlay]

in a dormant company with no assets and certainly no aircraft makes me the ongoing owner of a quite unique airline that is never going to fly. I identify two occasions when a declaration might reasonably have been made. I should have prefaced my speeches on 28 May 2015 and 11 June 2015 with a declaration that I hold 2p worth of shares in the dormant company. I most sincerely apologise to the House for my error and oversight.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the apology he has given to the House and, if I may say so, for the good humour he has displayed in the course of making his statement. I think it is acknowledged and accepted by the House.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you been made aware of reports in the past few minutes that seriously sick Labour Members might be prevented from voting this afternoon because of Government Whips breaking with the usual convention of allowing them to be nodded through? This would constitute a serious breach of the conventions of this House. I would be grateful if you could make a ruling, Mr Speaker, so that the Government Whips could hear it.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The short answer is that I had heard nothing of that until he sidled up to the Chair and mentioned it. The practice has long taken place on the basis of co-operation between the usual channels. There is nothing unusual about the arrangement—it is very long-established and commonplace—but it does not bear upon or speak to the functions of the Chair. It is a matter that has to be agreed between the different sides of the House. The right hon. Gentleman

is a very experienced Member of this House and he has registered, with some force and alacrity, his strength of feeling on the matter.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for former Members of the Houses of Parliament to take a seat at the Conservative table in the Tea Room and plot against the Government that they were once a part of? Would not those former Members be better off tending to their moats?

Mr Speaker: What I say to the hon. Gentleman is that who turns up at which table and says what to whom in the Tea Room might be a matter for the Administration Committee. The hon. Gentleman, who is himself an experienced denizen of the House, could potentially raise it, with advantage, with his hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who is not merely a distinguished ornament of that Committee, but in fact chairs it. As the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) knows, I am not myself these days in the habit of going into the Tea Room and I am not privy to these matters, but he has raised his point in his own delightfully understated way, with which Members on both sides of the House are well familiar.

BILL PRESENTED

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Sajid Javid, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary David Gauke, Secretary Greg Clark, Secretary Damian Hinds, the Solicitor General and Victoria Atkins, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with offences relating to offensive weapons.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 232) with explanatory notes (Bill 232-EN).

Armed Forces Representative Body

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

1.55 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create a staff association to represent the interests of members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces as employees; and for connected purposes.

In a week in which there has been much division and rancour in this place, I am glad to say there is one area on which we can reliably reach a broad consensus: when we talk about the service rendered by those who serve in our armed forces, not only in the way they willingly put themselves in harm's way to protect that which we hold dear, but the way in which service fundamentally shapes anyone's life, dictating where personnel live, how often they move, and, ultimately, how often they can see those they love. It is a sacrifice too few of the population understand.

If I am being honest, Mr Speaker, serving in the armed forces is a choice that many do not consider because of those immense sacrifices. I include myself in that category, even if it has proven to be an effective route for the advancement of diminutive working-class boys from the west of Scotland like myself. I do, however, come from a services family: my father a Royal Engineer, just like my nephew, and my brother beginning in the Highland Light Infantry, the 52 Lowland Battalion, before ending up in 6 SCOTS, where he currently serves.

If there is one thing I have noticed, it is the anomaly between those family and friends who have put themselves in harm's way wearing an Army uniform, and those who have put themselves in harm's way wearing a police or fire brigade uniform. Put a hero in a uniform and call them police or a firefighter, and they have a professional body or trade union to represent their interests; put them in an Army, Navy or RAF uniform and they do not. I cannot for the life of me see why. Similarly, as we talk of these public servants in such heroic terms, we often forget that they are also normal employees, with almost—almost—the same rights as anyone else.

Let me be clear for all hon. Members—and, I would hope, all hon. and gallant Members—here today: this Bill honours a commitment in my party's manifesto that seeks to create an armed forces representative body on a statutory footing, just like the Police Federation we have in each of the nations of these islands. Crucially, just like the Police Federation, it would not have the power to strike and thus it would not be appropriate to call it a trade union. However, I consider this to be very much one major missing piece in the ongoing struggle for the rights of employees, albeit one that I believe that both those on the Front Benches of the Conservative and Labour parties have not deemed important enough to consider throughout any of the periods they have had in government. I can only hope they follow the Scottish National party's lead here today and support the Bill, although I do salute the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), who presented a private Member's Bill on this matter nearly 10 years ago.

Quite simply, if the armed forces can speak with one voice, all 194,140 of them, then that voice would be one that the Government of the day would have to listen to. Improved economic and working conditions would follow.

The current status quo is failing service personnel, and ultimately, the relatively weak position that the disparate stakeholders find themselves in is not working in their favour.

Of course, serving personnel may join trade unions or professional associations linked to the work that they do, along with sectional groups that specifically represent their interests inside the armed forces, and we know that the work of the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body and the service complaints ombudsman is always welcomed. We also know that those in Main Building have often found it too easy to disregard their findings.

While the excellent network of the service families charities—I had an interesting meeting with the Naval Families Federation in my constituency office last Friday—along with SSAFA, Poppyscotland and many others, are diligent and determined champions for those in the armed forces community, I cannot help but conclude that their excellent work is no substitute for a united organisation whose single and unambiguous duty is to its members, and only its members. While there is a British Armed Forces Federation, it does not have the same level of recognition from the Government as similar bodies elsewhere.

It is actually an arrangement that is not so unusual among the small, northern European states in our neighbourhood, along with Germany and Australia. Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands all have different forms of armed forces representative bodies, some of which are trade unions and some of which are more informal, but which, none the less, are recognised negotiating or welfare bodies.

Some of those examples may have been what provoked some of the criticism of this Bill when it was written about in *The Sunday Post* last weekend. While I expected the usual nonsense about representation and advocacy somehow leading towards a permanent decline in standards and discipline, I was astonished at some of the bad faith arguments by those who would consider themselves experts in defence and security. Let me be clear again to anyone who would seek to block this Bill: all that is needed to secure better pay and conditions for those in the armed services is some more money from the Treasury and good will from Main Building. They are not living in the real world.

The personnel challenges faced by the Ministry of Defence are not insignificant, and to be fair, nor has its pecuniary response been, with some £664 million being spent over the last five years on recruitment and retention initiatives, and so I would hope that better representation and better prospects for those thinking of enlisting would help to drive that figure down. The recent NAO report on overcoming what now amounts to a skilled personnel shortfall of 5.7% overall, and significantly more in the pinch point trades, makes for eye-opening reading, and ultimately concludes that the current settlement is not sustainable, particularly when skilled forces personnel can make far more on civvy street. This situation will only be exacerbated as the skills expected of personnel move into the next generation of cyber and electronic warfare. In the real world, the armed forces must be able to compete with the tech start-ups.

However, the most compelling argument for an armed forces representative body comes not from looking to the future, but from looking at history. While much of the attention in the Chilcot report ultimately focused on

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

the decision to go to war and the intelligence used, for many of those who served there the most damning sections came near the end, when the failures in personnel and equipment planning came to the fore. For those of us, like me, whose loved ones served in the conflict, and even more for those—some may be here today in the Chamber—who were there, we have to wonder why it took so long for the Government to take action to address these programmes, even though we know so many raised concerns through the chain of command. I leave everyone here to draw their own conclusions as to whether the Government would have been as slow to react to personnel speaking with one strong voice.

If we consider that the end of UK operations in Iraq and Afghanistan also dovetailed with the beginning of austerity, pay freezes and the swingeing cuts to our military that this entailed, it is no surprise that there has been an adverse effect on the morale of those who serve. Indeed, it is no surprise that last month's continuous attitude survey saw overall happiness in the armed forces continue to fall. But there is a disconnect somewhere, because we all know that so much has been done in recent years to improve public perceptions of serving personnel, to make Armed Forces Day more prominent and to make it easier for personnel to make the transition to civilian life.

As I come to a close, let me posit a theory. Those who serve in our armed forces do so for a variety of reasons. I am fairly sure that “being a hero” is not usually one of them. The more that any Government fetishise the idea of heroic sacrifice, while failing in their basic obligations on pay and conditions, the lower morale will fall. What those who serve need is not platitudes from well-meaning politicians, but for the basics to be done right: to be paid, clothed and housed properly; to be supported and nurtured throughout their career; and to be able to deal with an employer that knows that if it does not meet its obligations, it will face 194,140 people speaking with one strong voice.

2.5 pm

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am grateful to you for allowing me to rise to oppose this Bill, Mr Speaker. Although I share many of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) in introducing his Bill, I have to say that I do not recognise the complaint that he seeks to address. I have spent time in the Ministry of Defence—admittedly not in the personnel role, but having met countless serving personnel across all services and at all levels—and not once in the nearly four years that I spent there did anybody ever suggest to me that a remedy for some of the natural complaints that serving personnel have from time to time would be the creation of a trade union or staff association. One of the reasons why nobody raised this as an issue—that I was aware of—is that there already are, as the hon. Gentleman touched on, a plethora of existing families federations across each of the services that do a very good job and exist to advocate on behalf of forces personnel and their families some of the issues that he is trying to address through the Bill.

Welfare of serving personnel is the top issue that they seek to contend with, and accommodation is another issue that is always high on their list. It is well acknowledged

by service chiefs, the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, which has responsibility for military quarters, that a considerable amount of work needs to be done. There is persistent investment in the military estate to try to bring up to contemporary standards some of the historical garrison accommodation, some of which is not only decades old, but goes back over 100 years. That is something that the Secretary of State is committed to trying to resolve and is working through the families federations to do so.

In addition to the families federations, there are the plethora of charities that support serving personnel, and in particular, veterans. The hon. Gentleman may or may not be aware that there are over 400 service-facing charities up and down this country helping veterans when they leave the service. I pay tribute to the work of COBSEO, which is the organisation that acts as an umbrella for these charity groups. It provides a signposting service for serving personnel as they seek to find their new career and come out of the armed forces, once they have served their tour of duty, to identify the areas where they might need help and support—much of the kind of work that I envisage the hon. Gentleman's putative staff association might be able to do. It would be nothing short of confusing to add another tier of advice and support through the body that he proposes, because one of the biggest challenges for a service leaver who decides that they need support for a particular direction, whether that is to find employment, housing or medical care, is where they turn to. That is why the existing structure of COBSEO does such a great job. In addition, there is the Veterans' Gateway, an online resource, funded, I believe, by the MOD, which enables individuals to find the right organisation to support them.

I must ask the hon. Gentleman, because it was not clear from his remarks, what wrong he is trying to right. If he is looking for a voice for serving personnel, as he indicated he was, I must point out that this exists through the families federations. If he is looking for access to the chain of command to represent personnel, I must point out that that is what the chain of command is for. The charities that support personnel in each of the services have continuous access to the chain of command and civil servants in the MOD and directly to Ministers through regular dialogue with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is sitting on the Front Bench today.

The hon. Gentleman speaks frequently on military matters on behalf of his party, and there is broad agreement across the House, from all parties, that we wish to provide for our serving personnel the highest possible standards of welfare and pay so as to recruit and retain the armed forces we need to keep this country safe. Nobody would doubt the commitment of the Conservative party, and I do not doubt his commitment, to meeting that objective, but I say to him gently that if he really wants to do the right thing for the personnel who serve in Scotland, he should ask his colleagues in the Scottish Government to think very carefully about whether making people pay more income tax simply for the pleasure of serving in Scotland will help us to recruit and retain experienced military personnel. That is a more significant and material measure that could damage the armed forces in Scotland, and he would do

well to think about that, instead of pressing this Bill. I will not press my opposition to a Division, but I hope the House has heard the strength of concern that I have and which is shared by others on the Conservative Benches.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Martin Docherty-Hughes, Ian Blackford, Liz Saville Roberts, Carol Monaghan, Stewart Malcolm McDonald, Douglas Chapman, Angela Crawley, Stephen Gethins, Stewart Hosie, Chris Law, Angus Brendan MacNeil and Pete Wishart present the Bill.

Martin Docherty-Hughes accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed (Bill 233).

EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) BILL: PROGRAMME (NO.4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 11 September 2017 (European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (Programme)), 16 January 2018 (European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (Programme) (No.2)) and 12 June 2018 (European Union (Withdrawal) Bill (Programme) (No.3)):

Lords Message of 18 June 2018

(1) Proceedings on the Message from the Lords received on 18 June 2018 shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one and a half hours after their commencement at today's sitting.

(2) The proceedings shall be taken in the following order: Lords Amendments Nos. 19C to 19E, 19G to 19L, 19P, 4B to 4E, 24C and 110B to 110J.

Subsequent stages

(3) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(4) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Mr David Davis.*)

Question agreed to.

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

Consideration of Lords message

Before Clause 9

PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL OF THE OUTCOME OF
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EU

2.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): I beg to move,

That this House agrees with Lords amendments 19C to 19E, 19G to 19L and 19P, and proposes Government amendments to Lords amendment 19P.

Mr Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following:

Manuscript amendment (b) and amendment (a) to the motion.

Lords amendments 4B to 4E.

Lords amendment 24C

Lords amendments 110B to 110J.

I inform the House that I have selected manuscript amendment (b), in the name of Mr Dominic Grieve, and amendment (a), in the name of Mr Tom Brake. I add, for the convenience of the House, that copies of manuscript amendment (b) are available in the Vote Office.

Mr Davis: I will turn in a moment to the issue at the forefront of many hon. Members' minds—Parliament's role at the conclusion of the negotiations with the European Union—but first I want to set out the other issues before the House for approval today. These are all issues where the Lords agreed with the Government on Monday: enhanced protection for certain areas of EU law, family reunification for refugee children and extending sifting arrangements for statutory instruments to the Lords. The Government set out common-sense approaches to those three issues in the Lords, who backed the Government, and the issues now return to this House for final approval.

The fourth issue is, as I have said, Parliament's role at the conclusion of our negotiations with the EU. Before we turn to the detail, let us take a step back for a moment and consider the long democratic process we have been on to get here. It began with the EU Referendum Act 2015, passed by a majority of 263 in this House, at which point the Government were clear they would respect the outcome of the referendum. This was followed by the referendum itself, which saw a turnout of over 33 million people and 17.4 million people vote in favour of leaving the EU.

We then had the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017, which empowered the Government to trigger article 50. Despite the attempts of some in the other place to impugn the validity of this notification, the Act passed through both Houses, with a majority of 372 in this place on Third Reading. This was followed by a general election where both major parties, attracting over 80% of the vote, stood on manifestos that committed to respecting the result of the referendum: 27.5 million votes for parties that said they would respect the referendum—no ifs, no buts. We are now in the process

[Mr David Davis]

of passing this essential Bill to get our statute book ready for the day we leave. It will ensure that we respect the referendum result but exit the European Union in as smooth and orderly a manner as possible.

We have already set out in law that this process will be followed by a motion to approve the final deal we agree with the EU in negotiations. If this is supported by Parliament, as I hope and expect it will be, the Government will introduce the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, which Parliament will have time to debate, vote on and amend if they so wish. Finally, as with any international treaty, the withdrawal agreement will be subject to the approval and ratification procedures under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. And this is all before we even consider the other pieces of legislation we have passed and will pass as part of this process.

Anyone who questions the democratic credentials of this Government or this process should consider the steps we have taken to get to this stage and those which we have already laid out in front of us. I believe they are greater than any steps taken for any international negotiations ever in the history of this country. Furthermore, contrary to what was said in the other place on Monday, the Bill gives Parliament significantly more rights than we see on the EU side. The European Parliament simply has to consent to the withdrawal agreement—a yes or no vote—and the EU member states will simply have a vote in the Council on the withdrawal agreement. We have considerably more powers than them, too.

I turn now to the detail of the amendment at hand. We start with a simple purpose: how do we guarantee Parliament's role in scrutinising the Government in the unlikely event that the preferred scenario does not come to pass? Our intention is straightforward: to conclude negotiations in October and put before both Houses a deal that is worthy of support. In approaching our discussions on this matter, the Government set out three reasonable tests: that we do not undermine the negotiations, that we do not alter the constitutional role of Parliament in relation to international negotiations, and that we respect the result of the referendum.

It is on that basis that we have tabled our amendments. This is a fair and serious proposal that demonstrates the significant flexibility that the Government have already shown in addressing the concerns of the House. Our original amendment provided that, if Parliament rejected the final deal, the Government must make a statement setting out their next steps in relation to negotiations within 28 days of that rejection. Our new amendments provide for a statement and a motion, ensuring that there is a guaranteed opportunity for both Houses to express their views on the Government's proposed next steps. Not only that, but we have expanded the set of circumstances in which that opportunity would arise, to cover the three situations conceived of in the amendment tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) last week. First, if Parliament rejects the deal, a statement must now be made within 21 days and a motion must be tabled in both Houses within seven sitting days of that statement. Alternatively, if the Prime Minister announces before 21 January 2019 that no deal can be agreed with the European Union, a statement must be made within 14 days, and a motion

must be tabled in both Houses within seven days of that statement. Finally, if no agreement has been reached by the end of 21 January 2019, a statement must be made within five days, and a motion must be tabled in both Houses within five sitting days. That would happen whatever the state of the negotiations at that stage.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Davis: I will give way to the Chairman of the Exiting the European Union Committee.

Hilary Benn: When the right hon. Gentleman appeared before the Committee recently, he confirmed that the motion asking the House to approve the withdrawal agreement would be amendable. Can he therefore explain to the House why the Government are now proposing amendments to Lords amendment 19P to include the reference to “neutral terms”? He will be well aware that Standing Order 24B says that, if a motion is considered by Mr Speaker to be in neutral terms, it cannot be amended. Why are the Government prepared to allow an amendable motion in one case, but not in the dire circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman is now describing?

Mr Davis: The right hon. Gentleman has prefaced perfectly the rest of my speech, because that is precisely what I shall spend the next 10 minutes explaining to him.

I think that the additional provisions speak for themselves. Our proposed amendment creates a formal structure, set out in law, for Parliament to express its views in all the various scenarios that might come to pass in our exit from the European Union, but it also passes the three tests that were set out by me and by the Prime Minister.

I am glad to see that the amendment sent back to us by the other place accepts the vast majority of these provisions. The core of the disagreement now focuses on the exact nature of the motion offered to the House if any of the unfortunate circumstances that I have previously mentioned come to pass. Our amendment offers those motions in neutral terms. Questions have focused, understandably, on whether that means that they would not be amendable. Members will, of course, be aware that it is not within the competence of Governments to judge whether amendments can be tabled to motions, but for the sake of clarity, let me quote from Standing Order No. 24B:

“Where, in the opinion of the Speaker or the Chair, a motion, That this House... has considered the matter, is expressed in neutral terms, no amendments to it may be tabled.”

I have written to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee setting out how the Government understand that this process will operate in practice and have laid a copy of that letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I am enormously grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene so early in his important speech.

I am most unhappy about the repetition by the Prime Minister, and by others in the Government, of the mantra “no deal is better than a bad deal”. I should like the Secretary of State to give a guarantee to the people

of Northern Ireland that the Government whom he represents here today will not be gambling with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. No deal would lead to a hard border, which would inevitably be exploited by Sinn Féin and by new IRA dissenters. I need that guarantee.

Mr Davis: The hon. Lady can be sure that we will not be gambling with the status of the border. I shall come back to the issue of no deal in a moment, because it is central to much of the issue of the amendability of motions.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Is not the importance of the position that the Government are taking that, if a “no deal” option is ruled out, that will guarantee a worse deal in any negotiation? Anyone who has been party to a negotiation will understand that.

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is right, and I shall come back to that point in a second.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The satisfactory amendment that left the House of Lords would oblige the Government to table a substantive motion if their agreement were being rejected. No doubt they would draft that with a view to commanding the majority of the House, but other people could table a substantive amendment with alternative proposals for how to proceed. My right hon. Friend rejects that, and is trying to replace it with a situation in which the Government do not have to put anything in their second amendment, except that they take note. Then, if anyone tries to table a substantive motion as an amendment, I will give you a pound to a penny, Mr Speaker, that the argument will be “If you pass this, it will mean no deal, because the Government are not going to negotiate this, and it will bring the thing to an end.”

I cannot for the life of me see why the Government are hesitating about the Lords amendment, except, of course, that they have come under tremendous pressure from hard-line Brexiteers in the Government, who caused them to reject the perfectly satisfactory understanding that had been reached with Conservative Members who had doubts last week.

Mr Davis: I am afraid that I do not agree with my right hon. and learned Friend, as he will be unsurprised to hear. I will not try to follow him down the path of what might happen and in what circumstances. I shall explain in a moment the reasoning behind the restriction of amendment, which is precisely accurate in this area.

Let me say this to my right hon. and learned Friend. He has been in the House even longer than I have, and he knows full well that very often, when matters are particularly important, the procedural mechanism of a motion does not actually determine its power or its effect. That goes all the way back to the Norway debate, which arose from an Adjournment motion tabled by the Chief Whip of the day, and which changed the course of the war. So I do not take my right hon. and learned Friend's point at all.

The amendment sent to us by the other place does not offer those motions in neutral terms. It is therefore possible—indeed, I would predict, likely—that wide-ranging amendments will be tabled which would seek to instruct

the Government how to proceed in relation to our European Union withdrawal. This may seem to be a minor point of procedure, but it is integral to the nature of the motions, and to whether they pass the three tests that I set out last week.

The debates and amendments of the last week have revolved around what would happen in the event of no deal. Let me explain to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) the distinction between the amendments and the motion that we promised the House—indeed, I think that I first promised it to him as long ago as the article 50 debate. The provisions of the motion will come about if the House rejects the circumstances of a deal, but the amendments apply principally to the issue of no deal, which is really rather different. Let me also make it clear to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) that I have never argued in favour of no deal. I do not favour no deal, and I will do what I can to avoid no deal. It is not an outcome that we are seeking, and, as things stand, I am confident that we will achieve a deal that Parliament can support. However, you cannot enter a negotiation without the right to walk away; if you do, it rapidly ceases to be a negotiation.

The Lords amendment undermines the strength of the United Kingdom in negotiations. There are plenty of voices on the European side of the negotiations who seek to punish us and do us harm—who wish to present us with an unambiguously bad deal. Some would do so to dissuade others from following us, and others would do so with the intention of reversing the referendum, and making us lose our nerve and rejoin the European Union. If it undermines the UK's ability to walk away, the amendment makes that outcome more likely. That is the paradox. Trying to head off no deal—and this, too, is important to the hon. Lady—is actually making no deal more likely, and that is what we are trying to avoid.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must ensure that Opposition Members whose constituents, like mine, voted strongly to leave vote with us, and vote to stop these amendments?

Mr Davis: I take my hon. Friend's point, but, at the Dispatch Box and elsewhere, I have always insisted that people vote with their consciences, and their consciences should encompass how they represent the wishes of their constituents.

If the European Union expects Parliament to direct the Government to reconsider its policies, to extend article 50 or even to revoke it, it will have an incentive to delay and give us the worst possible deal just to try to bring about such an outcome.

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

Mr Davis: I am not giving way for the moment. I hope the hon. Lady will take that on board.

2.30 pm

This is already clear from the European Union's approach so far in some areas of negotiations. We have seen an inflexibility in its approach to Galileo. We have even seen it yesterday in its inflexible approach to internal security generally. Furthermore, my team and I

have seen it at first hand: whenever something happens in the Commons or the Lords that increases uncertainty, negotiations slow down. When they believe we might be forced to change our position to suit them, they stall. We cannot allow such an approach to become commonplace across all negotiations.

While I am glad that we have moved away from the proposition that Parliament can give unilateral, wide-ranging, legally binding instructions to the Government in international matters, an amendable motion nevertheless countenances a situation in which Parliament can direct the Government on how they should proceed. There is a clear difference between Government taking Parliament's view into account as expressed through a debate and Parliament instructing the Government how to act. That difference is reflected in the two amendments on offer today.

Finally, the amendment by the other place could be used to undermine the result of the referendum. Lord Hailsham willingly admits he believes the decision of the British people in 2016 was, in his words, a "national calamity." Lord Bilimoria spoke in similar terms previously when he described it as a no-Brexit amendment. This amendment is consistent with our belief: it sets out in law a clear path to follow for those who wish to frustrate the withdrawal from the EU.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Davis: In a moment.

Our amendment on the other hand is consistent with the notion that it is right for Parliament to express its view but not to instruct the Government on how to conduct themselves in an international negotiation.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Davis: As I have said, it passes the three tests set out by myself and the Prime Minister.

I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies).

Philip Davies *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we come to the intervention, there is a point of order; I hope it is not a point of frustration.

Paul Farrelly: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am reading here in the media for the first time a ministerial statement from the Secretary of State purporting to explain how "neutral terms" would operate in practice, and I assume that you have seen the statement, Mr Speaker. It says:

"Under the Standing Orders of the House of Commons it will be for the Speaker to determine whether a motion when it is introduced by the Government under the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is or is not in fact cast in neutral terms and hence whether the motion is or is not amendable."

Therefore, Mr Speaker, my question to you is this: what discretion does that leave you in practice if such a motion is cast in time-honoured neutral terms in the first place?

Mr Speaker: The discretion that I have always had in such circumstances is the short answer to the hon. Gentleman. This matter may or may not be treated of further at a later point in our proceedings, but I do not want to detract from the time available for the debate.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I think the Secretary of State had given way to his hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies).

Philip Davies: I am very grateful.

Will my right hon. Friend commend our hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), who on the radio today, with his characteristic openness, said that he hoped that, if the amendment of our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) were passed today, the House would use that in order to suspend the triggering of article 50, which let the cat out of the bag as to what the motive is, which is to delay, frustrate or even stop entirely the UK leaving the European Union?

Mr Davis: As I have said throughout, it is for people to go with their consciences on this matter and I do not attack anybody for doing that.

May I pick up on the point of order raised with you, Mr Speaker? I would not want the House to think that in any way it had not been told about this. In my earlier speech, I outlined the issue of "Erskine May" on this matter and Standing Order 24B and your rights in this, and made it plain that that is what we are relying upon. So I would not want the House to be misled in any way, or to believe it has been misled.

The debates on this issue have been in the finest traditions of this House. Hon. Members have stood on issues of principle and argued their cases with the utmost integrity. That has shifted the Government's approach to a position where our Parliament will rightly and unquestionably have its say and express its view. For in this, the greatest democracy of all, we debate, we argue, we make our cases with passion, but we do it to a purpose and that is to deliver for our people, not just to please ourselves. They decided that we will leave the European Union and, whatever the EU thinks about that, we will do it, and we will do it in the best way we can. And in that spirit I commend this motion to the House.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I rise to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) to preserve Lords amendment 19P, which would ensure that Parliament has a meaningful vote in the Brexit process.

We need to be clear about what this amendment is and what it is not. It is not about frustrating or blocking Brexit, it is not about tying the hands of the UK negotiators, and it would not empower Parliament to direct the Government in the ongoing negotiations. It is simply about this House playing a meaningful role in the terms of the final Brexit deal. It is about making sure that on the most important peacetime issue this House has faced for a generation, this House is not silenced.

This amendment addresses two issues: what happens if Parliament rejects the Prime Minister's proposed article 50 deal in the autumn; and what happens if by

21 January next year there is no article 50 deal or no prospect of an article 50 deal. The Prime Minister has consistently said, “Tough luck; if you don’t like my proposed deal you can have something much worse.” That is not meaningful. The Brexit Secretary, once a great guardian of the role of this House, now wants to sideline Parliament when its voice is most needed. He says that in the event that the Prime Minister’s proposed article 50 deal is rejected by Parliament or there is no article 50 deal, a Minister will make a statement. Well, I should think so—after two years of negotiation, the Government bring back a deal which is rejected and a Minister will make a statement. And he says that will happen not in 28 days, but in 21 days—that is democracy; that is giving Parliament a real voice. And then a further safeguard: there will be a neutral motion. There is an example of a neutral motion on today’s Order Paper. There is to be a debate about NATO and what will be decided is this:

“That this House has considered NATO.”

That is the additional safeguard—“That this House has considered the article 50 deal.” And that is it; that will be the role of this House on the most important decision that we will make in this Parliament.

No one who values parliamentary sovereignty should accept either approach, and that is why the amendment is crucial. It would require the Government to back up any statement made by a Minister with a motion that can be voted on. It would permit Parliament to have a meaningful say, but only after negotiations are complete.

Of course the very idea of Parliament actually having a say prompts the usual cries, and I have no doubt that many of the interventions will be along these lines, so let me deal with them. The usual cries are these: “It’s an attempt to frustrate Brexit,” “It will weaken the Prime Minister’s negotiating hand,” “Parliament cannot micromanage negotiations.” So let me meet those objections.

First, we have heard it all before. In August 2016 we challenged the Government to produce a plan. What did they say? It would frustrate Brexit, it would tie our hands and it would play into the hands of the EU. Then they had to accept a motion to produce a plan, and the sky did not fall in. In the autumn of 2016 we challenged the Government to give Members of this House a vote on the proposed article 50 deal, and got the same response from the same people in this House—it would frustrate the process, it would tie the Prime Minister’s hands and it would play into the hands of the EU. Then we had the Lancaster House speech in January 2017; the Prime Minister agreed to give MPs a vote, and the sky did not fall in.

In December 2017, we challenged the Government to put the article 50 vote into legislation. That was contested through amendment 7, for the usual reasons. We received the usual response: it would frustrate Brexit, it would play into the hands of the EU and it would tie the Prime Minister’s hands. Amendment 7 was voted on, and the vote went against the Government. The sky did not fall in. In February this year, we challenged the Government to publish the impact assessments. We got the usual response: it would frustrate Brexit, it would tie the Prime Minister’s hands and it would play into the hands of the EU. Then the impact assessments were published, and the sky did not fall in. This amendment is not about frustrating the process; it is about making sure that there is a process.

Secondly, we have to confront the fact that the biggest threat to an orderly Brexit, and the biggest threat of having no deal, is and always has been division at the heart of the Government. They cannot agree the fundamentals. The customs arrangements were hardly an unexpected issue. No one should be under any illusion that the EU cannot see the fundamental weakness of the Government’s position.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Will the shadow Secretary of State confirm that the Labour party is not trying to frustrate Brexit, and that the policy of our party and our Front Bench is that we will be leaving the European Union in March 2019?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know how important this is for her constituency, and I can confirm that that has always been our position.

Ms Angela Eagle: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way. At least he has allowed someone from this side to make an intervention, which the Secretary of State did not have the decency to do. Will he explain what on earth a meaningful vote would mean if there was a Hobson’s choice Brexit—a choice between the deal we have done or no deal at all? Is not avoiding a Hobson’s choice Brexit what this entire debate is now about?

Keir Starmer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because it goes to the heart of the issue: If Parliament is given a vote on article 50, and if we do not like what the Prime Minister has brought back, we can have something much worse. Even a child could see that that is not an acceptable choice.

Mr Baron: Perhaps those on the Opposition Benches are missing the central point. In any negotiation, ruling out the possibility of no deal will guarantee the worst outcome. Anyone who has conducted a negotiation in business understands that. If those on the Opposition Benches do not understand it, they are missing the central point.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention. I have always been curious about this tactic. What will happen at the end of the negotiations if there is no deal is that we will be pushed over a cliff. Volunteering to jump first has never appeared to me to be a great tactic.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I will not give way, because I want to complete this answer.

No deal was never a credible threat, and as each day goes past, it becomes less credible. There is no immigration law that can come into force in March 2019, and there are no staff to administer it. There are no customs arrangements. There is no infrastructure. If we do not have a deal, we will not have any arrangements for law and security. It is not a credible threat, and this notion that we have to pretend we are going to do something that is incredible has no bargaining impact.

The third argument against our position is that it somehow passes an advantage to the EU, and it is based on the proposition that, but for this amendment, the Prime Minister would proceed undisturbed on her course to take us out of the EU without a deal—that she would

[*Keir Starmer*]

calmly, and with the full support of this House, head for the cliff of no deal. That seems extremely unlikely. This amendment is about what will happen at the end of the negotiations, not at the beginning. It would allow Parliament to have a meaningful role once the negotiations are over, and it would not tie the Government's hands during the negotiations. What it would mean, however, is that the course that the Government would take, in the event that article 50 was voted down or that there was no deal, would have to be supported by a majority in this House. Standing back, that looks like common sense.

2.45 pm

It is unthinkable that any Prime Minister would seek to force through a course of action that would have significant consequences for many years which the majority in this House did not approve of. That is unthinkable, and the idea that that is how we would achieve an orderly Brexit is for the birds. The amendment would provide order where there would otherwise be utter chaos and, for those reasons, I urge hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House to support the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, to preserve Lords amendment 19P.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I beg to move manuscript amendment (b), to leave out from first "19P" to end.

I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for having enabled this amendment to be considered this afternoon by accepting my manuscript. It is a very odd and, I have to say, unsatisfactory aspect of the way in which our Parliament does its business that we frequently end up on ping-pong debating amendments that are irrelevant to what the House is really troubled about. I have to tell the House that, in order to get to this point, it has been necessary also to twist the rules of procedure in the other place, and I am immensely grateful to those peers who facilitated the manuscript amendment that was tabled there and that has enabled us to consider for the first time this afternoon the issue of the meaningful vote in relation to the Government's view of what it should be and to the suggestion that has come from their lordships' House. I should like to say here and now how deeply I object to the way in which their lordships are vilified for doing the job that we have asked them to do, which is to act as a revising Chamber and to send back to this House proposals for our consideration.

The issue, which has been highlighted by earlier speakers, is about the form that a meaningful vote should take. There are two options in front of the House. The House will recall that, when this matter first arose last week, the amendment that had come from the Lords included a mandatory element. That is constitutionally rather unusual. Indeed, I do not think that it has happened since the civil war in the 17th century, and I do not think that that ended very well. I seem to recall that it ended with Oliver Cromwell saying:

"Take away that fool's bauble, the mace."

Because of this, I considered it to be excessive. I apologise to the House that, in trying to produce something else very late at night last week, I probably did not draft it quite as well as I might have done. However, it led to a

sensible discussion, prompted by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who had a number of us in her room and said she would do her best to meet the concerns we were expressing on there not being a meaningful vote on no deal.

Last Thursday, it looked as though we were going to reach an agreement based on exactly the terms of the Lords amendment that has come back to us, but at a very late stage, it was indicated to me that the Government did not feel able to proceed with that. I should like to emphasise that I make absolutely no criticism of those with whom I negotiated, who have behaved impeccably in this matter. Indeed, at the end of the day I have to accept that negotiations may sometimes founder at the last minute. However, this was unfortunate, from my point of view, and I will come back to that point in a moment.

Be that as it may, the Government's tabled amendment was the one that we are being asked to accept today—the one that simply asks us to note and does not give us the opportunity of amending. Two arguments were put to me to justify that change when it occurred and in the negotiations that followed. The first was that there was concern about the justiciability of the amendment. The Standing Orders of the House cannot be impugned in any court outside of this high court of Parliament, but it is right to say that if one puts a reference to the Standing Orders into a statute, that can raise some interesting, if somewhat arcane, legal issues about the extent to which a challenge can be brought. My view is that I do not believe that the amendment, which is currently the Lords amendment that has come to us, is credibly open to challenge. For that matter, I happen to think that the Government amendment is also not credibly open to challenge either, although it is worth pointing out that it is as likely to be challenged or capable of being challenged as the other. I do not accept a differentiation between them.

The second argument was of a very different kind. It was said to me—this was picked up by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—that the Government had real concerns that this issue, which is one of detail, had acquired such a status with those with whom we were negotiating that it could undermine the Government's negotiating position in trying to get the United Kingdom the best possible deal for leaving the EU. Now, I must say that I found that difficult to accept based on my own range of contacts and on how I thought that the EU is likely to work. However, it is not an issue that I, as a supporter of the Government, can entirely ignore.

I am very troubled about Brexit. It is well known in this House that I believe that we have made an historic mistake in voting to leave, but I am open minded as to what the best course of action should be and respectful of the decision of the electorate in the referendum result. I dislike very much the extent to which we can be fettered or pushed into frameworks of what we have or have not to accept in that negotiation but that is, if I may so, a reason why I should also give as much latitude to the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as she indicates to me that she might have.

Mr Baron: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Grieve: No, I wish to conclude.

In those circumstances, there is an issue that I cannot ignore. As the House will have noticed this afternoon, a statement was sent by the Secretary of State that will become a written ministerial statement tomorrow. The first part of it deals with the position of the Speaker and, if I may put it like this, the piquancy of this is that having on the one hand said that an unamendable motion to note is an unamendable motion to note in a statute, the fact is that it really has absolutely no force at all. The reality is that it is part of the Standing Orders of this House, and it is not open to any interpretation in any court and, ultimately, it will be entirely your responsibility, Mr Speaker, to decide what can or should not be treated as a neutral terms motion. Actually, the statement highlights the fact that, although this debate has been about trying to provide assurance—not just in this House, but to many members of the public outside who are worried about the end of this process and what might happen—the truth is that the assurance does not lie in the words of the statute, except in so far as the statute is the word of the Government. The assurance lies in the hands of this House and, in the first part of the statement, in the power of the Speaker.

I then insisted that a second piece be put into the statement, which I will read out. If I may say so, this ought to be blindingly obvious, but it says:

“The Government recognises that it is open for Ministers and members of the House of Commons to table motions on and debate matters of concern and that, as is the convention, parliamentary time will be provided for this.”

If this House chooses to debate matters, including matters on which it may wish to have multiple motions, the reality is that if we wish to exert our power to do that, we can. In the circumstances that might follow a “no deal”, which would undoubtedly be one of the biggest political crises in modern British history, if the House wishes to speak with one voice, or indeed with multiple voices, the House has the power to do so.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The bit I do not understand is that many motions have been carried by this House in the past few years—motions tabled by the Backbench Business Committee, by the Opposition and by ordinary Members—but the Government have just let them go through and then completely ignored them. The only thing that has legislative effect is legislation. That is why we must have a meaningful vote, not a pretend one.

Mr Grieve: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right, but if the Government were to concede to the amendment, as drafted in the Lords, for an amendable motion, the House must understand that the Government could ignore it. I can assure the House that it would not be enforceable in any court of law—[*Interruption.*] No, that really must be understood. It could not be enforceable in any court of law, because that would entirely undermine the rights and privileges of this place. It would be for us to enforce it. Of course, the ultimate sanction that this House has is a motion of no confidence but, short of that, there are other means by which the House can in fact bring its clear view to bear on the Government.

Mr Baron: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Grieve: No, I will not.

In view of that acknowledgement, I must say that I weigh that and the clear words of this statement against what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has told me about her anxieties. My judgment—it is purely personal—is that if that is the issue, having finally obtained, with a little more difficulty than I would have wished, the obvious acknowledgement of the sovereignty of this place over the Executive in black and white language, I am prepared to accept the Government's difficulty, support them and, in the circumstances, to accept the form of amendment that they want. I shall formally move my amendment at the end, because I do not want to deprive the House of the right to vote if it wishes. Members have the absolute right to disagree, but it seems to me that, with the acknowledgement having been properly made, I am content to go down that route.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Grieve: No, I want to end.

We are facing some real difficulties at the moment. It is rightly said that those whom the gods want to destroy, they first render mad. There is enough madness around at the moment to make one start to question whether collective sanity in this country has disappeared. Every time someone tries to present a sensible reasoned argument in this House vilification and abuse follow, including death threats to right hon. and hon. Friends. There is a hysteria that completely loses sight of the issues that we really have to consider. There is an atmosphere of bullying that has the directly opposite consequence in that people are put into a position where they feel unable to compromise, because by doing so they will be immediately described as having “lost”—as if these were arguments to be lost or won. The issue must be that we get things right.

Right at the other end of the spectrum, we get some other ridiculous things. I have had *Daily Mail* journalists crawling over the garden of my house in France. I do not quite know, but I think they were looking for silos from which missiles might be aimed at the mansion of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). The area where I have a holiday home has a history of monsters and witches chucking megaliths backwards and forwards across the channel. Such is the state of our discourse, and that is the very thing we must avoid. We are going to have differences and, if there is no deal, those differences may extend to my taking a different view, as a Member of Parliament, from what the Government might wish. This House has a right to act if there is no deal in order to protect the interests of the British people, and the responsibility in those circumstances lies as much with us as it does with the Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I very gently point out that we have less than 45 minutes, and I do want to accommodate other Back-Bench Members.

3 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful for the chance to take part in this debate.

[Peter Grant]

Once again, we will be hearing the siren voices of the hard-line no deal Brexiters, of whom there are some in this place, claiming that they, and they alone, have a monopoly on respect for democracy, on respect for Parliament and on a patriotic love for their chosen country.

They will demonstrate their regard for democracy by unilaterally and retrospectively changing the question that was asked in the 2016 referendum while assuming that the answer will stay the same. They demonstrate their respect for Parliament by doing their damndest to keep Parliament out of playing any meaningful role in the most important events any of us is likely to live through. And they demonstrate their patriotic love for their country by pushing an agenda that threatens to fundamentally damage the social and economic foundations on which their country, and indeed all of our respective countries, was built.

There should be no doubt about what the hard-liners are seeking to achieve here. They tell us that the Lords amendments are about attempting to stop Brexit but, in their private briefings to each other, they tell themselves they are worried that these amendments might stop a cliff-edge no deal Brexit—that is precisely what I want these amendments to stop.

The hard-liners are seeking to create a situation where if, as seems increasingly likely by the day, a severely weakened Prime Minister—possibly in the last days of her prime ministership—comes back from Brussels with a miserable deal that nobody could welcome, the only option is to crash out of the European Union with no agreement on anything.

Although I hear the Secretary of State's words of warning that a person should not go into a negotiation if they cannot afford to walk away, I remind him that the Government started to walk away on the day they sent their article 50 letter. From that date they had no deal, and the negotiation is about trying to salvage something from the wreckage of that disastrous mistake.

The far-right European Research Group would have us believe that its opposition to amendment 19P is just about preventing Parliament from being allowed to tell the Government what to do. I am no expert in English history, but I thought the civil war was about whether Parliament has the right to tell the monarch and the Government what to do.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that this Parliament finds itself in a very strange position? This Parliament actually does not want to have a vote. In fact, I think it voted not to have a vote. Even if it does not want to have a vote, it is still legitimate to have a vote. Not to have a vote is a bizarre dereliction of responsibility by this Parliament, which is why we need Scottish independence and not the mess and the carnage we see before us.

Peter Grant: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The reason why some in this House are determined not to give Parliament a meaningful vote is that they are worried an overwhelming majority of parliamentarians on both sides of the House might vote against the cliff-edge scenario they have already plotted for us.

But the real reason why some Government Members, and even one or two Opposition Members, are acting now to block the chance of this so-called sovereign Parliament to have any powers on this whatsoever is that they know that if they put their true agenda before the House, in all probability it would be greeted by a majority that is numbered in the hundreds, rather than in the tens or the dozens.

They say the Government have to be protected at all costs from Parliament, because Parliament might do something the Government do not like. Is that not what Parliaments are for, especially a Parliament in which the Government have lost their democratic mandate to form a majority Government by their cynical calling of an unnecessary and disruptive election?

The Prime Minister has asked us not to accept the Lords amendments because she does not want to have her hands tied. It is none of my business whether the Prime Minister likes having her hands, her feet or anything else tied, but surely the whole point of having a Parliament is so there is somebody with democratic credibility and democratic accountability to keep the Government in check when it is clear to everyone that they are going in the wrong direction. If plunging over a cliff edge is not the wrong direction, I do not know what is.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Although the hon. Gentleman says it is none of his business whether the Prime Minister has her hands, her feet or anything else tied, does he accept it is in the interest of the country for the Prime Minister to have the freedom to go and negotiate the best deal for the country? Parliament cannot negotiate the detail of that deal. Only the Prime Minister can do that.

Peter Grant: These amendments contain no desire for Parliament to be involved in the negotiations, but we are being asked to believe there is no possibility that the negotiations will fail. That is what we are being asked to believe, except some of those who give us that promise are hoping the negotiations will fail, because some of them have already decided that they want to push for a no deal Brexit, despite the calamitous consequences outlined by the Secretary of State.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree this appears to have more to do with trying to hold the Tory party together—Tory Members are negotiating among themselves as we speak—rather than for the benefit of the whole United Kingdom?

Peter Grant: My hon. Friend and constituency neighbour makes a valid point. In fact, it is worth remembering that the only reason we had a referendum was to bring the Tory party together. That worked out well, didn't it?

The reason why some Government Members get so hot under the collar about the danger of giving Parliament a meaningful vote is that, if the House approves something, rather than simply considering it, they claim it could subsequently be used as the basis for a legal challenge. I will not gainsay the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) but, interestingly, both of the cases the Government quote in their document to prove that a meaningful vote could lead to a legal challenge resulted in rulings that actions of the House,

whether they are a resolution, a Committee decision or an order of Parliament, do not have the status of an Act of Parliament. Interestingly, one of the cases was about a pornography publisher who sued *Hansard* for damaging his reputation as a publisher.

The ERG briefing contains a dark, dark warning about what could happen if the Government lose a vote at the end of the negotiating process. The briefing says it could undermine the Government's authority and position. In fact, in the briefing's exact words;

"This could produce an unstable zombie Government."

The briefing gives no indication as to how any of us would be able to tell the difference. The real giveaway is the third of the three "practical problems" the briefing sees with amendment 19P:

"It effectively seeks to take no deal off the table."

That is the real agenda here. I want no deal off the table, and the Secretary of State does not want no deal, so why is it still on the table? The intention is that under no circumstances will Parliament have the right to pull us back from the cliff edge. It is not just about keeping no deal on the table; it is about making sure that, by the time we come to make the decision, there is nothing on the table other than no deal.

In my younger days, which I can vaguely remember, I used to be a keen amateur mountaineer, and I loved reading books about mountaineering and hill walking. One book I read was an account of the first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. Unlike some cliff edges, the Matterhorn did not have safety barriers. Edward Whymper and his six companions got to the summit, but during the descent four of the party fell over a cliff to their deaths after the rope holding the group together broke. There were suggestions of foul play and murder most foul, but the rope just had not been strong enough. If it had not broken, it is likely that all seven would have been killed. There are hard-line Brexiteers in this House who are determined to drag us over the cliff edge. I want Parliament to be allowed to erect a safety barrier, not to stop those who want to get to the bottom of the cliff reaching their destination, but to make sure that anybody who gets there is in one piece. As I have made clear before, I have no intention of usurping the democratic right of the people of England to take good or bad decisions for themselves, but no one has the right to usurp the democratic decisions of the people of Scotland. Let me remind the Government, once again, that if they seek to drag their people over the cliff edge, our people are not going to follow. The Government will find that there is not a rope in existence strong enough to hold Scotland to their country if their country seeks to take us over that cliff edge.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: With immediate effect, a four-minute limit on Back-Benches speeches will apply.

Philip Davies: First, let me say that I very much agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) about the nature of political debate in this country. He is absolutely right to point that out and I agree with him wholeheartedly.

The second point I wish to make is that many people in this House seem to forget that there have been two meaningful votes. The first was when this House decided

to give a referendum to the British people. The second was the referendum itself, in which the people voted to leave the EU. They were meaningful votes.

Angus Brendan MacNeil *rose*—

Philip Davies: I am not going to give way, because time is limited. Since then, some people who did not like the result of that referendum and perhaps did not even expect it have had a new-found enthusiasm for the rights of this Parliament to decide all sorts of things. They were quite happy for all of these powers to be given over to the EU willy-nilly, but they now have this new-found enthusiasm that this House should decide everything.

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

Philip Davies: I am not going to give way. As I was saying, if only that had been the case before. I excuse from this my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), because he did not vote to have a referendum and so there is absolutely no reason why he should feel in any way bound by its result. I perfectly respect that; his position has been entirely consistent. What I have no time for—

Mr Kenneth Clarke: To make it clear, this totally irrelevant argument that we are trying to reverse the referendum is as irrelevant to me as it is to any other of my right hon. and hon. Friends. This House voted, by an enormous majority, to invoke article 50. We are now trying to debate, and have parliamentary influence over, what we are going to do when we have left and what the form of our new arrangements with Europe and the rest of the world will be. So will my hon. Friend stop, yet again, introducing—this is not just him, but he is the ultimate Member to do it—this totally irrelevant argument and try to say what is wrong with the process set out in the Lords amendment? What is the excessive power that it apparently gives this House to have a say when the negotiations are finished?

Philip Davies: I am afraid that the public are not fooled by the motives of people who clearly want to delay, frustrate or overturn the result of the referendum. It is a shame some of them cannot admit it. The shadow Secretary of State said that people had said over a long period of time that if we did this or that, Brexit will be frustrated. May I just suggest to him that he gets out of London, because people around the country feel that Brexit is being frustrated? It is already being frustrated a great deal by this House. So he has this idea that Brexit has not been frustrated, but he needs to get—

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): How?

Philip Davies: My right hon. Friend, who has taken a vow of independence since he lost his job as a Minister—he had never shown this before—asks how. I would invite him to get out—[*Interruption.*] He is welcome to come up to Yorkshire—

Mr Vaizey: I go there frequently.

Philip Davies: He should speak to people then. I am perfectly content for this House to vote on whether it wants to accept the deal negotiated by the Government that they come back with. It is absolutely right that this

[Philip Davies]

House votes on whether or not to accept that deal, and the Government should accept the vote of this House. What it cannot do, having decided to give the people a vote in a referendum, is find some strange parliamentary mechanism in order to frustrate and overturn the result—

3.15 pm

Mr Grieve: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Philip Davies: My right hon. and learned Friend did not give way, and I am not going to give way either because time is limited. Parliament cannot vote to reverse the decision of the referendum. People outside this House need to know very clearly today that—

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Philip Davies: I am not going to give way, as there is no time. I want people outside this House to know that those who are voting for this “meaningful vote” today mean that if the Government decide that no deal is better than a bad deal—[*Interruption.*] Does it not show how out of touch this place is that “no deal is better than a bad deal” is even a contentious statement? It is a statement of the blindingly obvious, but amazingly some people find contentious.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Philip Davies: I am not giving way, because I want to let other people have time to speak. Members should bear that in mind. I have given way to the Father of the House. [*Interruption.*] I appreciate that my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) does not like hearing arguments with which she disagrees, but I am going to plough on regardless, despite her chuntering from a sedentary position. The fact that no deal is better than a bad deal is blindingly obvious to anyone with even a modicum of common sense. People in this House are being invited to accept that if the Government decide that no deal is better than a bad deal, this House should somehow be able to say to them, “You’ve got to continue being a member of the European Union while you go back and renegotiate this and renegotiate that.” I cannot stand aside and allow that to happen, and I do not think the British people will thank anybody in this House who votes that way. Let nobody be in any doubt: the constituents of anybody who votes for this meaningful vote today should know that they are voting to try to keep us in the European Union, against their will.

Hilary Benn: May I say to the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) that the argument he has just advanced is not true? I believe a very small number of Members of the House would cheerfully jump over the edge of a no-deal cliff, which is why we are having this argument this afternoon.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), for whom I have enormous respect, is right when he says that this is a very fraught, difficult and tense debate, where passions are running high. Given that the referendum split the country right down the

middle, that is not entirely surprising. I gently say to him that, given the experience he went through last week, when he thought he had an assurance and then discovered that he did not, if I were him, I would be very, very cautious about accepting further assurances. However, I respect the decision that he makes.

I would be cautious for the reason I put my question to the Secretary of State, who is no longer in his place. I listened carefully to what he said and I heard no explanation, no justification and no argument for why the Government are prepared for the House to debate an amendable motion to approve the withdrawal agreement—that is what he indicated when he came before the Select Committee—yet, when it comes to deciding what takes place in the event that the nation is facing the prospect of no deal, they are insisting on having a motion in “neutral terms”. That may or may not allow the Speaker to come to the rescue of the House by allowing the motion to be declared amendable. However, as I read Standing Order 24B, as long as the Government do their job in drafting the motion, the Speaker will have no choice but to declare it a motion in “neutral terms” and it will therefore not be amendable.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does not this compromise give enormous power to you, Mr Speaker? That is all very well, because you are a Speaker who has stood up for the rights of this House and of Back Benchers, and for the majority in this House to be able to have meaningful votes, but were you to fall under a bus in the next few months, what guarantee would there be that a future Speaker would stand up for the rights of this House in the same way that you have done?

Mr Speaker: I will do my best to observe the road safety code.

Hilary Benn: It is not for me to advise you, Mr Speaker, but please do not cross any roads between now and the end of this process.

It seems to me that the Government’s intention throughout has been to seek to neuter this House when we come to the end of the process. We are talking about the possibility of facing no deal at all. In his speech from our Front Bench, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) set the position out very clearly: first, not only would we be facing economic difficulty of the most serious kind—with impacts on trade, on our services industry and on broadcasting—but there would be impacts on the security of our nation, because with no deal in place, how would the exchange of information continue? These are not minor matters; they go to the heart of the Government’s responsibility to make sure that we are safe, that industry works, that taxes are raised and that public services are paid for. That is why people are getting exercised about this. It is not just some amendment to one Bill; it is the most important decision that the country has faced for generations.

As my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out, we are not ready to cope with the consequences. Members should contemplate this, for a moment: if, because the House cannot do anything about it, we fall off the edge of the cliff, and future generations look at us and say, “What did you do at that moment? What did you do? Didn’t you say anything?”, are we, as the House of

Commons, really going to allow our hands to be bound and say, “Well, at least I took note of what was happening”? Our responsibility is not to take note; it is to take charge, to take responsibility and to do our job.

Mr Grieve: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that, if he looks at the Standing Orders, he will see that, if the House wants to take charge at that point, it will be able to do so. If necessary, I will join with him in doing just that.

Hilary Benn: I absolutely bow to the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s expertise, but I am afraid that, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras pointed out earlier, under this Government, we have sat on these Benches on too many occasions, time and time and time again, on which the House has used the Standing Orders to debate a matter and pass a motion but the Government have sat there and said, “We’re not taking any notice of you whatsoever.” That is why the opportunity to ensure that we have the right to amend a motion is, in the next few minutes, in the hands of this House. There will be no further opportunity to take back control, so I hope the House will do so by voting in favour of the amendment of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I urge Members to help each other.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful, again, to the other place for sending us the amendment. I have been concerned about this issue since the referendum, and have been open in my views about the need for a meaningful vote and parliamentary sovereignty. This is about our country’s future and ensuring that we enhance, not reduce, our democracy. When I was re-elected last year, my constituents were under no illusions about how important I thought a meaningful vote was, as I had already made my concerns public and, indeed, voted for such a vote during the article 50 process.

Views may differ regarding the desirability of no deal. In my view, it would be utterly catastrophic for my constituents and the industries in which they work, but surely all sides should welcome the certainty that the amendment would bring to the process. We are often accused of wanting to tie the Government’s hands, but nothing could be further from the truth. How can the amendment tie the Government’s hands during negotiations when it concerns the steps that should be taken when negotiations have broken down? In other words, it concentrates on events after the negotiations.

Philip Davies *rose*—

Antoinette Sandbach: I will not give way.

I support the Government’s negotiation and strongly believe that the Prime Minister will succeed in her negotiation. However, it would be irresponsible not to have a process in place for what will happen should negotiations collapse. What is more, the amendment would ensure that, when the Prime Minister sits down to negotiate, our European partners know that she does so with the full backing of Parliament. Far from binding

the Prime Minister, it would strengthen her hand. I encourage all my colleagues to recognise that the amendment would empower both Parliament and our negotiators. It lays out a contingency should disaster strike, and it delivers on the commitment to take back control to Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A three-minute limit will now apply.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for selecting amendment (a); my pleasure at being able to speak to it is enhanced by the fact that this opportunity came completely out of the blue, and I welcome that.

The principal purpose of my amendment is to provide clarity such that in all eventualities there will be the opportunity for people to have a final say on any deal that the Government strike, and such that Parliament will not be left stranded with no deal, with which would come the closure of our ports, food shortages, medicine shortages and general chaos. *[Interruption.]* If Government Members do not believe that, I advise them to talk to the people at the port authority at Dover to hear what they think no deal would mean. I make no apology for the fact that I do want to stop Brexit, which I do not think will come as a surprise to many people in the Chamber. I do not, though, believe that the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), or, indeed, my own amendment, would achieve that aim.

Brexit is a calamity. We are going to be poorer, more insecure and less influential, with fewer friends in the world and more enemies as a result of it, and that is happening already. Some Government Members know that and say it; some know it and keep quiet; and some know it and claim the opposite, although I am not going to embarrass those who shared platforms with me during the EU referendum campaign and said then that it would cause calamity, but now claim the opposite. Some Government Members deny it. Their life’s ambition has been to achieve Brexit and they could not possibly accept that it is now doing us harm.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman is making a fine speech. To put some numbers on this calamity, a no-deal Brexit would cause an 8% damage-event to GDP. For context, the 2008 crash was a 2% damage-event to GDP. The over-the-cliff Brexiteers are looking to damage the UK economy four times as much as the 2008 crash did. Well done, guys!

Tom Brake: Absolutely. We understand the calamity that would be no deal. I think that nobody here or in the European Union believes that the Government would actually settle for that, because of the consequences that it would have for our economy.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

Tom Brake: I will just make a bit more progress in the minute and a half that is left.

There would be, if time allowed, a chorus of the “will of the people” from the Government Benches, but let me make two points about that. Two years on from 23 June 2016, who is clear about what the will of the

[Tom Brake]

people now is? The whole purpose of providing a final say on the deal is to test whether the will of the people is the same now as it was two years ago.

As Members of Parliament, are we delegates or representatives? We are elected to use our judgment, from the Prime Minister downwards, who campaigned to remain because she used her judgment and thought that Brexit would cause us damage and would damage our communities up and down the country. Many Conservative Members used their judgment then. I am afraid that their judgment now seems to have left them. The Government's own assessment confirms that the impact of Brexit will be wholly negative.

Therefore, the delegates in this House will push on with a policy that is detrimental to British families. The representatives in this House will recognise that a way out of this ideological nightmare into which we have got ourselves has to be found. Today, we will be able to decide and to demonstrate which of those two things we are—delegates or representatives.

3.30 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) got it absolutely right in his response to the Chairman of the Brexit Committee that the constitutional power of this House to determine who is in Government is entirely unaffected by these amendments or the written ministerial statement that will be laid tomorrow. The powers, the authority and the rights of this House remain intact, and that is not dependent on whether a meaningful vote is amendable or unamendable.

Mr Speaker, as an historian of this House and its powers, you know perfectly well that the Norway debate was held on the Adjournment of the House—whether or not it should adjourn for the Whitsun recess. That great issue of the time—whether we should have a few days off at Whitsun—led to a fundamental change in the Government and the whole history of our nation that flowed from it.

Ms Angela Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do apologise to the hon. Lady, but I will not give way, because other people want to speak, and time is very short.

Therefore, the rights of this House are intact. The legislation will ensure that the Government can pursue their objectives, which is very important. The Chief Whip is in his place. I commend him for the tactful way that he has discussed these issues with so many people over the past week to ensure that we could come to something that every Conservative Member is able to agree to and put their name to that maintains the privileges of this House, ensures that the Government can negotiate properly, and sends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to the negotiating table with a united House of Commons behind them.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today. I will make just a couple of remarks.

I want to reiterate the comments that have been made that this is not about reversing Brexit or about tying the hands of the Government. This is about what happens and the role of Parliament if things go wrong. It is about clarity, about what will happen in this Parliament and to the interests of our country in the event of no deal, or no deal being agreed by this House.

It is incredibly disappointing to have reached this position. It could have been so different. A week after the referendum, I wrote to the then Prime Minister. I then wrote to the current Prime Minister. I made the argument that it was in the interests of our country that this House came together, that we had ways of working across parties, across this House and the House of Lords, and that we came to a solution together and worked through the issues together. But, step by step, we have seen a Government who have run and a Government who have hidden—a Government who have not even wanted to bring forward their own impact assessments so that we can take part in an evidence-based debate on the impact of Brexit on our country and get the answer right. A process by which this country comes together is essential if, in the autumn, we reach a situation in which what was unthinkable becomes thinkable. To have a way in which we handle that is our responsibility.

Every large Government project has a risk register and a response to those risks. This is a critical risk for our country and it is vital that, in advance of such a situation, we all know what is going to happen and that we have a say, on behalf of our constituents, about what could be an incredibly catastrophic situation for our economy, our country and our society.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I would like to accommodate further speakers.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I shall make the shortest speech here that I have made for very many years—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ever!”]—and I shall take no interventions. [Interruption.] Well, the Government are restricting debate on this European issue as ferociously as they are trying to restrict votes and powers. I voted against both the previous timetable motions. With no explanation, we have been told that we have an hour and a half for this extremely important issue today. Presumably, it is to allow time for the interesting debate that follows, taking note on the subject of NATO, which could be tabled at any time over the next fortnight and has no urgency whatever. None of us are allowed to say very much about this matter.

The Government have been trying to minimise the parliamentary role throughout the process. That is only too obvious. I will try to avoid repeating anything that others have said, but the fact is that it started with an attempt to deny the House any vote on the invocation of article 50, and litigation was required to change that. A meaningful vote has been resisted since it was first proposed. The Government suffered a defeat in this House during the earlier stages of our proceedings before they would contemplate it, and then they assured us that they would not try to reverse that; there would be a meaningful vote. But actually, because that amendment needs amplification and the Bill needs to be made clearer, we now have this vital last stage of Lords amendments and the final attempt to spell out

what meaningful votes and parliamentary influence are supposed to mean, and it is being resisted to the very last moment.

Last week, I thought that the Government would be defeated because of their resistance. I was not invited to the negotiations. I do not blame the Chief Whip for that in the slightest. I have not fallen out with him personally, but I think that he knew that I would take a rather firm line as I saw nothing wrong with Lord Hailsham's amendment if nothing else were available. My right hon. and hon. Friends, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), actually believed that they had undertakings from the Prime Minister, and I believe that the Prime Minister gave those undertakings in good faith.

My right hon. and learned Friend for Beaconsfield negotiated with a very distinguished member of the Government acting on the Prime Minister's behalf, and they reached a firm agreement. That agreement is substantially reflected in Lords amendment 19P and my right hon. and hon. Friends expected that it would be tabled by the Government. It was not. And now the Government are resisting the very issue upon which last week a very distinguished member of the Government reached a settlement—to use the legal terms—because the Government are not able to live up to their agreement. We are being asked to substitute, for a perfectly reasonable Lords amendment, a convoluted thing that would mean arguments about the Speaker's powers if it ever had to be invoked.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): There are only two issues that come out of this debate. The first is about honour. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) tried to ensure that he got a deal from the Prime Minister. He went with other Members to negotiate with her and she made a promise to him about an amendment, but that promise was not necessarily fulfilled in the interpretation of the Members who heard her say it, so the House of Lords had to send this issue back to us today. This issue is definitely about honour. Other hon. Members have said that they believe that the House can pass resolutions and motions, and that they will be honoured, even if they are not necessarily binding. I believe that the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield is an honourable man, and he is again taking the Government at their word.

That brings me to the second issue, which is that this is also about Parliament. If the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield has achieved anything, it is that he has moved the Government from where the Prime Minister was on "The Andrew Marr Show" on Sunday, when she said that Parliament cannot tie the hands of Government. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield has managed to extract a statement from the Government, who are now saying that it is open for Members to table motions, that parliamentary time will be provided, and that it is open for this House, through Mr Speaker, to ensure that motions and decisions can be made. The right hon. and learned Gentleman believes that that is worth having and it is indeed true that it is a step forward. The difference that I have with him is that he believes that the Prime Minister and the Government should be given the benefit of the doubt yet again; I would suggest that he should not and could not necessarily trust their word. That is where we differ.

Mr Speaker: The time limit is now two minutes.

Sir William Cash: There is just one fundamental point that I would like to make about this debate, which is that the decision that was taken in the European Union Referendum Act 2015—by six to one in the primacy of this House of Commons and in the House of Lords, which endorsed it—was to accept that the people of this country, not 650 Members of Parliament, would make the decision in the referendum. I need say only one word about this: our constitutional arrangements in this country operate under a system of parliamentary government, not government by Parliament.

Chris Bryant: When I was training to be a priest in the Church of England, my professor of systematic theology was called John Macquarrie. He would say that he was often asked by parishioners, "What is the meaning of God?", but that actually the far more important question is, "What is the meaning of meaning?" To be honest, it feels as though that is what this afternoon's debate and last week's debate have been about: what is a meaningful vote?

The first point is that a meaningful vote is surely not one that is meaningless. We had a meaningless vote on Monday afternoon after the SO24 debate. It was meaningless because we were voting on whether this House had considered the matter of the Sewel convention, and even if every single Member of the House had voted against that, we would none the less have considered the matter. This is exactly what we do with statutory instruments as well: we vote on whether we have considered the matter. The Government's motion will require the Government—not allow them but require them—to table a neutral motion.

I disagree with the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who said that the vote in 1940 was on the Adjournment. It was not—it was on whether this House should adjourn for a successive number of days, and it was an amendable motion that would have had effect—

Mr Rees-Mogg *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman if he does not mind. [*Interruption.*] Oh, all right.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I said that the vote was on the Whitsun recess, so I think that I covered that point.

Chris Bryant: But the hon. Gentleman managed to elide the fact that it was an amendable motion that had effect.

The point is that if the Government do what their motion says they should do—namely, table a neutral motion—the written ministerial statement gives the Speaker no power whatever to decide that it is not neutral. Indeed, if a Speaker were to decide that a neutral motion was suddenly, somehow or other, not neutral and could be amended, we should remove him from the Chair because he would not be abiding by the Standing Orders of this House. So let us make it absolutely clear: if it is a neutral motion, it will be a motion that has no meaning whatever.

Anna Soubry: I am concerned that the editor of the *Daily Mail* has made a small doll that looks like me and is sticking pins in its throat, as every time I want to

[Anna Soubry]

speak, I get this wretched infection. However, I want to make some very important points.

I completely agree with all the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). History will recall what a remarkably brave woman she has been throughout all of this. I, too, will vote for the amendment, because I agree with much of what has been said: this needs to be in statute. I pay real tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has yet again shown outstanding leadership and courage, as indeed have many Members of the House of Lords. It is in tribute to them, if nothing else, that I shall vote for this amendment. But primarily I shall vote for it because it is in the interests of all my constituents. I was elected to come here to represent all of them, including the 53% who did not vote for me, and the 48% who voted to remain, who have been sidelined and abused. The big mistake that we have made, from the outset of all that has followed from the referendum result, is that we have not included them.

Finally, I say gently to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) that he has to remember that some hon. Members will vote with the Government today as an act of faith and trust in the Prime Minister that the sort of comment he made will no longer exist in this party, and that we will be more united. It is her role, if I may say so, to make sure that we have more temperate speeches.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I hold the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) in very high regard for his integrity and fluency. I do, however, say gently that he is in danger of turning into a modern-day grand old Duke of York. There are only so many times you can march the troops up the hill and down again without losing integrity completely. In the little time remaining, I want to talk about neutral motions, which are at the centre of this dispute—

3.45 pm

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83G), That manuscript amendment (b) be made.

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 319.

Division No. 191]

[3.45 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Beckett, rh Margaret
Abrahams, Debbie	Benn, rh Hilary
Ali, Rushanara	Berger, Luciana
Allen, Heidi	Betts, Mr Clive
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Black, Mhairi
Amesbury, Mike	Blackford, rh Ian
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Blackman, Kirsty
Ashworth, Jonathan	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Austin, Ian	Blomfield, Paul
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brabin, Tracy
Bardell, Hannah	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben

Brake, rh Tom	Fletcher, Colleen
Brennan, Kevin	Flynn, Paul
Brock, Deidre	Fovargue, Yvonne
Brown, Alan	Foxcroft, Vicky
Brown, Lyn	Frith, James
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Furniss, Gill
Bryant, Chris	Gaffney, Hugh
Buck, Ms Karen	Gapes, Mike
Burden, Richard	Gardiner, Barry
Burton, Richard	George, Ruth
Butler, Dawn	Gethins, Stephen
Byrne, rh Liam	Gibson, Patricia
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Gill, Preet Kaur
Cadbury, Ruth	Glendon, Mary
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Goodman, Helen
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Grady, Patrick
Carden, Dan	Grant, Peter
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Gray, Neil
Champion, Sarah	Green, Kate
Chapman, Douglas	Greenwood, Lilian
Chapman, Jenny	Greenwood, Margaret
Charalambous, Bambos	Griffith, Nia
Cherry, Joanna	Grogan, John
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Gwynne, Andrew
Clwyd, rh Ann	Haigh, Louise
Coaker, Vernon	Hamilton, Fabian
Coffey, Ann	Hardy, Emma
Cooper, Julie	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Cooper, Rosie	Harris, Carolyn
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hayes, Helen
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hayman, Sue
Cowan, Ronnie	Healey, rh John
Coyle, Neil	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Crawley, Angela	Hendry, Drew
Creagh, Mary	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Creasy, Stella	Hermon, Lady
Cruddas, Jon	Hill, Mike
Cryer, John	Hillier, Meg
Cummins, Judith	Hobhouse, Wera
Cunningham, Alex	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Daby, Janet	Hollern, Kate
Dakin, Nic	Hosie, Stewart
Davey, rh Sir Edward	Howarth, rh Mr George
David, Wayne	Huq, Dr Rupa
Davies, Geraint	Hussain, Imran
Day, Martyn	Jardine, Christine
De Cordova, Marsha	Jarvis, Dan
De Piero, Gloria	Johnson, Diana
Debbonaire, Thangam	Jones, Darren
Dent Coad, Emma	Jones, Gerald
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Jones, Graham
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	P.
Dodds, Anneliese	Jones, Helen
Doughty, Stephen	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Dowd, Peter	Jones, Sarah
Drew, Dr David	Jones, Susan Elan
Dromey, Jack	Kane, Mike
Duffield, Rosie	Keeley, Barbara
Eagle, Ms Angela	Kendall, Liz
Eagle, Maria	Khan, Afzal
Edwards, Jonathan	Killen, Ged
Efford, Clive	Kinnock, Stephen
Elliott, Julie	Kyle, Peter
Ellman, Dame Louise	Laird, Lesley
Elmore, Chris	Lake, Ben
Esterson, Bill	Lamb, rh Norman
Evans, Chris	Lammy, rh Mr David
Farrelly, Paul	Lavery, Ian
Farron, Tim	Law, Chris
Fellows, Marion	Lee, Karen

Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 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, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 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
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jeff Smith and
 Nick Smith**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine

Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hoey, Kate

Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky

Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 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
 Pow, Rebecca
 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
 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
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo

Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Stuart Andrew and
 Andrew Stephenson**

Question accordingly negated.

The Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83G).

Main Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments 19C to 19E, and 19G to 19L agreed to.

Government amendments made to Lords amendment 19P.

Lords amendment 19P, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendments 4B to 4E, 24C, and 110B to 110J agreed to.

4.5 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. What means do I have to correct the record given that at Prime Minister's questions today, my neighbour, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), may have inadvertently cited my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Transport as being responsible for a timetabling issue that affects my constituency? The emails that she referenced were three years old, from a time when neither of my right hon. Friends were in their current roles. The timetabling issue and the current disruption are separate issues. I will continue to work with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to ensure that the best service for my constituents is met. I felt that it was important to bring this point to the House.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise this attempted point of order, upon which the sagacious advice of the senior procedural adviser of the House is, forgive me, that it was not much of a point of order. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman is not in a small minority in that regard. If it is any comfort to him, I can assure him that in my 21 years' experience in the House, the vast majority of points of order are bogus.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): You used to do it!

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I used to do it. I do not remember that, but if I did, all I would say to him is that that was then, and this is now.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sure that the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore) was as shocked as I was to read the content of many of the emails that were released both to him and to me under the Freedom of Information Act. Their content has had such serious implications for my constituents and his. Given that the Department has not released emails during the current Secretary of State for Transport's tenure and has stopped at the point at which the current Secretary of State was appointed, I wonder whether I could seek your guidance as to whether it might be in order to direct the Secretary of State to release those emails and come clean about what he knew, and when.

Mr Speaker: I do not think it is open to me to issue any direction of the kind that the hon. Lady suggests, but the hon. Member for Southport (Damien Moore) made his point in all sincerity and it is on the record. Now the hon. Lady, who is at least equally dextrous, has made her own point in her own way and it is on the record—I rather imagine that each of them will rely on those words, as doubtless they co-operate in future on this important matter.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Very dextrous.

Mr Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) now basks in the glory of approval from a Member who is in his 40th year of consecutive service in the House, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman).

NATO

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I beg to move,

That this House has considered NATO.

As we look around this Chamber, we see plaques on the walls, such as that of Major Ronald Cartland, killed in action during the retreat to Dunkirk; Lieutenant Colonel Somerset Arthur Maxwell, who died of wounds received at the battle of El Alamein; and Captain George Grey, killed in action fighting in Normandy. These are just some of the men who served as Members in this House who lost their lives defending our country in the second world war. They remind us of the sacrifice that people have made so that we can enjoy the freedoms and democracy of today.

They are only a small number, however, of those from every part of the country and the Commonwealth who gave everything to save our nation from one of the greatest threats it had ever faced. It is all too easy to forget the price they paid. We in this House have never been in a situation in which the actual existence of our country has been called into question. While the sacrifice and service of so many delivered victory in 1945, however, we should not forget either that Britain continued facing a real and enduring danger after that moment.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It is stronger than that, is it not? Ronald Cartland was at Cassel, on the corner between Dunkirk and Calais, when the evacuation was happening at Dunkirk. They stayed at Cassel knowing they would almost certainly lose their lives if they stayed the extra day. It is a phenomenal sacrifice they made. They knew death was coming and yet they were able to stand there to protect others.

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. It is difficult to articulate or convey in a speech the sacrifice that was made, not just by one but by many, in order that we might have what we have today. The sacrifice, the commitment and the dedication, not just of those in the past but of those who continue to serve in our armed forces today, are so often forgotten by all of us. That is why we all in the House have a special duty towards them.

After the second world war, we still could not take peace and stability for granted, and it was then that we turned to NATO and the tens of thousands of British servicemen and women who stepped up to protect our nation from new threats. Had Ernest Bevin not set out his vision of a joint western military strategy and helped to sell the idea to the United States and other nation states, it is doubtful that NATO would have been born. And had it not been for the willingness of Clement Attlee's Government to support the idea and the continued backing of successive Conservative and Labour Governments, this great strategic military alliance would never have got off the ground, let alone grown and matured into the great military alliance that has protected us for almost 70 years.

It is well worth reminding ourselves what NATO has achieved in the decades since its birth. It has consolidated the post-world war two transatlantic link. It has prevented the re-emergence of conflicts that had dogged Europe

[Gavin Williamson]

for centuries. It has led operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. What would have happened if NATO had not held firm during the bitter chill of the cold war? Would the Berlin Wall still stand, casting its shadow over the west? Would millions still be living free, secure and prosperous lives? Even as we enter a new age of warfare, NATO continues to adapt to the times.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the appropriate way in which he has framed this debate, and it is true that NATO played and continues to play an irreplaceable role in the security of the west, but it faces immense challenges, which I know he will come to in his speech, not only from without but from within. One of them is its inability to transform itself fast enough in the face of current challenges, which are quite outside anything it has ever faced before and for which it is remarkably ill equipped. Does he agree, therefore, that it is incumbent on the Governments of the 29 members to make it a part of the 2018 NATO summit that transformation must proceed apace and that the political and military will of those Governments must be reflected in those decisions?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we do not change not just our military structures to ensure that they can best respond, but the political structures to which the military structures will turn to be given their direction—if we do not change, if we do not reform, if we do not have the agility to respond to the enemies that this nation and our allies face—NATO will be an organisation that is found wanting.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The presence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Chamber, just before he ran out of the door—[HON. MEMBERS: “He is here!”]—prompts me to raise with the Secretary of State the question of funding. Will he reconfirm the notion that our contribution of 2% of GDP is not a target but an absolute floor, and that if we are to stand true with our friends in NATO we must aim for 2.5% or 3%, because otherwise we will simply not be able to do what we are seeking to do in the world?

Gavin Williamson: With my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer peering at me from behind the Speaker’s Chair, I feel that I must be on my very best behaviour.

We have always seen 2% as a floor, and spending on defence has varied over the years. I think that when the Government came to office it was at a slightly higher level than 2%. Indeed, I think that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was Secretary of State for Defence it stood at 2.3% and 2.4%, but that took account of the operations in which we were involved in Afghanistan.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Was my right hon. Friend talking about a flaw or a floor? [Laughter.]

Gavin Williamson: As we see it, 2% is very much a floor: a base on which to build. We can be very proud to be one of the few nations in NATO that meet the 2% commitment, and we can be exceptionally proud of the work done under the leadership of my right hon.

Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon)—and, of course, that of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor before he moved to the Foreign Office—in establishing that all NATO members needed to spend more.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): There are various metrics by which our peacetime defence investment can be measured, one of which is how it compares with spending on other high-expenditure departmental matters such as health, education and welfare. Does my right hon. Friend recall that as recently as the 1980s, we were spending roughly the same on defence as we were spending on health and education? I am not saying we should repeat that, but given that we are spending two and half times as much on education as we spend on defence, and four times as much on health—and that was before the recent rise—does he not believe that defence has fallen a bit too far down the scale of our national priorities?

Gavin Williamson: I could see the excitement on the Chancellor’s face as my right hon. Friend outlined his proposals. I was not sure whether it constituted agreement that we should be setting those targets, but I am sure that we shall have to negotiate on the issue over a long period.

We must ensure that NATO is adapting—and continues to adapt—to the times, and also to the threats that it faces. Since its creation, we have always seen Britain leading from the front. Not only do we assign our independent nuclear deterrent to the defence of the alliance, as we have for the past 56 years, but our service personnel and defence civilians are on the ground in Eastern Europe at this very moment, providing a deterrence against Russian aggression.

It has been my privilege to see their dedication and devotion to duty in Estonia, where we are leading a multinational battlegroup, and in Poland where they are supporting the United States forces. And at the same time our sailors are commanding half of NATO’s standing naval forces, and our pilots, ground crew, and aircraft have returned to the Black sea region, based in Romania, to police the skies of our south-eastern European allies. Just last year UK forces led the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and we became the first ally to deliver cyber-capabilities in support of NATO operations.

Meanwhile, UK personnel form a critical part of NATO’s command structure. So I am proud that the UK will be sending more than 100 additional UK personnel to bolster that command structure, taking our total to well over 1,000. As we look at the emerging threats and the challenges our nation faces going forward, it is clear that we must make sure that NATO has the resources: that it has the capability and the people to man those command structures, in order for us to meet those threats.

NATO needs the extra support to deal with the growing threats. The dangers we face are multiplying all the time and come from every direction. We are confronting a host of new threats from extremism to cyber-warfare, dangers global in nature that require an international response and a global presence. We are witnessing the rise of rogue states conducting proxy wars and causing regional instability, while old threats are returning.

Russia is a case in point. Back in 2010 Russia was not clearly identified as a threat. The focus of our attention was ungoverned spaces such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but by 2015 the emergence of new threats was becoming apparent to everyone and this threat has accelerated and increased over the last three years.

In 2010 our Royal Navy was called on just once to respond to a Russian naval ship approaching UK territorial waters; last year it was called on 33 times. Russian submarine activity has increased tenfold in the north Atlantic, to a level not seen since the cold war. The Russians are also investing in new technology, through which they aim to outpace our capability. They are concentrating on our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and we must be realistic and accept that we are going to have to invest in new capabilities to deal with these new threats.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is a re-emergence of a peer-on-peer threat, and while some great new pieces of kit are now entering service with our Army, Navy and Air Force, does he agree that the pace of their arrival and the new capabilities that will augment them cannot be swift enough as we make sure we are capable once again of fighting against our peers, not just mounting counter-insurgency operations?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the pace and delivery of both the new equipment and the support we give our armed forces is important. We must make sure they get that new equipment, that new kit and that new capability as swiftly as we can.

Our Air Force planes have been scrambled 38 times since 2012 in response to Russian military aircraft. Russia continues to use its cyber-bots and fake news to undermine democracies across the world; we have seen very clear examples of that in Montenegro, Estonia and elsewhere. And we ourselves have had the shocking attack in Salisbury—the first offensive nerve agent attack on European streets since the second world war.

So there is plenty to focus our minds as we head into the Brussels summit. That is why, earlier this month at the NATO Defence Ministers meetings, we took decisions alongside our allies to further strengthen NATO's command structure, enhancing its naval presence and putting in place the right capabilities to defend the Euro-Atlantic area as it is increasingly threatened. We also took that opportunity to clarify our three priorities for the pivotal summit meeting in July.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): On the issue of the Brussels summit, while it is true that NATO is inestimably more important in collective defence than the European Union, Europe's nascent defence capability has nevertheless shown itself to have some utility. When we leave the European Union, what will our response be to things that have worked, such as Operation Atalanta and the EU battle groups, of which the UK has been an important part?

Gavin Williamson: We have always been clear that the interests of European security are very much our interests. That was the case before we joined the European Union and it will certainly be the case after we leave. We are open to discussions about how we can continue to work with our European partners—working and leading, if

and when that is appropriate. We must not underestimate our capability compared with that of other European nations. We are at the leading edge. We are one of the very few European nations that can lead operations and make a real difference. We recognise the fact that, as we leave the European Union, we want good strong relationships in terms not only of operations but of defence strategy, procurement and industrial strategy. We will continue to work closely with the European Union.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): My constituency is home to Astrium, which is involved in the Galileo project, and to MBDA, which manufactures Brimstone, Sea Ceptor and a variety of other products that keep our country safe. This shows the strength of bilateral relationships and the importance of procurement. Is the Secretary of State confident that that will continue to happen?

Gavin Williamson: I am confident that we will be able to reach agreement on how we move forward. We must not forget that 90% of the defence industry relationships we have with other European nations are bilateral, rather than being conducted through the European Union. That is something that we will look to continue to strengthen.

As we look forward to the NATO summit, we need to accept first and foremost that we have to invest more in defence. We need our allies to step up and spend a minimum of 2%. This is something that the United Kingdom has led on ever since the Wales NATO summit in 2014, and our efforts have encouraged all allies to increase their spending. More are meeting that target, and most have plans to reach it. As the NATO Secretary General said earlier this month, non-US spending has increased by \$87 billion between 2014 and 2018, but the US still accounts for more than 70% of the allies' combined defence expenditure. When Britain leaves the European Union, 82% of NATO's contribution will come from non-EU countries. We have to be honest with ourselves, however. We cannot expect US taxpayers to keep picking up the tab for European defence indefinitely; nor can we expect US patience to last for ever. We as a continent have to step up to the responsibility of playing a pivotal role in defending ourselves and not to expect others to do it for us.

Today presents us with an opportunity to play a bigger role in defence. Our next priority will be about ensuring that the alliance is ready to act rapidly. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) touched on at the start of the debate, we need to be able to act within weeks, days or hours, not months.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The right hon. Gentleman will remember the discussions we had about NATO and defence spending when he was wearing a different hat about a year ago. Will he go into more detail about the other countries that are not contributing 2% of GDP? When does he estimate that some of our major European partners will reach the 2% threshold? They are spending more, but when are they likely to reach the threshold?

Gavin Williamson: I remember those discussions well, and I kind of wish that the right hon. Gentleman had demanded that a few more ships be built at Harland

[Gavin Williamson]

and Wolff—perhaps a third aircraft carrier. We expect eight nations to be meeting the 2% target by the end of this year and 14 nations by 2024, but that is still not enough. Some of the largest economies in Europe continue to lag behind considerably. Estonia is meeting the 2% target, but we must encourage other nations, such as Germany, to take the opportunity to spend 2% on defence. My open offer to them is that if they do not know how to spend it, I am sure that we could do that for them.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned logistics and forward planning just before the question from the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). Given our continuing commitment to withdraw from Germany, will he update the House on the Government's thinking about rebasing there?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about readiness and our ability to respond. I will touch on that later in my speech, so the hon. Gentleman should feel free to intervene then if I need to make something clear.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Going back to the naval issue and equipping NATO, does my right hon. Friend agree that that is about not just increasing the level of spending to 2%, but where it is invested? The Royal Navy is going through a period of complete renewal and will have some of the most advanced ships and capabilities in the world. Will he be making representations, especially at the NATO summit, about the need to review matters and have leading technologies, particularly against the threat of Russian naval technology? After the failure of the Zumwalt-class destroyers and its return to the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, the United States is going backwards with some of its technology.

Gavin Williamson: We can be proud of our investments in new technology, such as the new Poseidon aircraft that will operate over the north Atlantic or the Type 26 frigates that are currently being constructed in Glasgow. We are leading the world in the development of and investment in technology. Nations such as the United States actually look to us to take that leadership, to point the way forward and to take responsibility for ensuring that the north Atlantic routes remain safe.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): On the readiness of our armed forces, will the Secretary of State tell us about the Government's record on Army recruitment? We are worried that they are making insufficient progress on this important matter.

Gavin Williamson: We are doing everything that we can, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces is leading on that, ensuring that meet all our operational requirements and, most importantly, changing how we recruit so that we are able to fill the Army to our desired target of 82,000.

Nick Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Williamson: I have been very generous in taking interventions. Will the hon. Gentleman let me make some progress?

We need to look at how we ensure NATO is able to respond swiftly to changing threats not in months, not just in weeks but in days and hours, and not simply on land, sea and air but in the new grey danger zones of cyber-space and space itself. For that to happen, our alliance must keep changing and adapting to deal with new threats. NATO must reform itself structurally so there are far fewer barriers to action, and it must reform itself politically so nations can swiftly agree on measures to take and on how to use the power at their disposal decisively, particularly when it comes to cyber and hybrid attacks, which often occur beneath the normal threshold for a collective response.

Lastly, NATO must maintain the mass needed to assemble, reinforce and win a conflict in Europe at short notice. We need to look at how we can forward base more of our equipment, and possibly personnel. That is why today we are looking hard at our infrastructure in Germany, particularly our vehicle storage, heavy transport and training facilities. Along with our NATO allies, we are continually testing our agility and responsiveness through exercises in Europe.

We need to do more, and we need to look more closely at how we can have the forces we need to deal with the threats we face today. The threats today are so different from the threats in 2010, but we should not underestimate our adversaries' intent and willingness to use military force.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I see that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is no longer with us, but it will not have escaped his notice that this is a very well attended debate.

When the Defence Secretary gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence, he told us it would take 90 days to mobilise our war-fighting division and deploy it to the Baltic states in an emergency. Can he give the House any reassurance that we are looking at that again in the Modernising Defence programme to see whether we can come up with ways of responding more quickly if the situation requires?

Gavin Williamson: We must not look at this issue in isolation. We need to look at it as an issue that every NATO member has to face and deal with. We have to work incredibly closely with our allies, whether it is Germany, Poland or Estonia, on how we can be more responsive and how we can ensure that we have the capability to react to those changing threats.

NATO is only as strong as its weakest link, so every NATO member must do what it needs to do to give its people the modern equipment, the skills and the support to cope with the challenges that lie ahead. We need a future force that is able to respond rapidly and globally, a force that can operate in the full range of combat environments and across all domains, and a force to provide leadership in NATO, European formations and coalitions.

We must never hesitate: sometimes we will have to lead others, and sometimes we will have to act alone. We have to have the capability and the armed forces to be able to do that. NATO must do more to up its spending, to speed up its response and to reinforce its capabilities, but to succeed in this darker and more dangerous age, it must show one quality above all—resolve.

As in the old days of the cold war, adversaries new and old are seeking to divide us, to undermine our values and to spread lies and misinformation. Our response must be unity. We must stand firm and we must stand together, speaking with one voice and holding fast to the vision that united us in the days of old against aggression, against totalitarianism and against those who wish to do us harm. And we must be ready to stand in defence of our security and our prosperity.

The UK should be immensely proud of the role it has played in the alliance since its inception and of the way it has helped lead the organisation during the most challenging period in its modern history, but, as I told our allies the other day, we are not looking backwards. Our eyes are firmly fixed on the future and on how we can make sure NATO remains the world's greatest defensive alliance, the guardian of free people everywhere and the guarantor of the security of future generations.

In its great charter, NATO commits

“to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”

Those are British values. They are at the heart of our nation. For the past 70 years, brave British men and women have given their all to defend our nation. We are determined to do everything in our power to ensure the alliance continues to guard our great liberties for another 70 years and beyond.

4.41 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I welcome this opportunity to debate the role of NATO. The timing is particularly appropriate, with the debate coming ahead of the NATO summit next month. The alliance is the cornerstone of our defence and our collective security, and Labour Members are proud of the role our party played in its founding. The leadership of Clement Attlee and his Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was so instrumental in setting up the alliance in 1949. Bevin moved the motion

“That this House approves the North Atlantic Treaty”.

That established NATO. He spoke in that debate of the backdrop of growing global instability and the shared determination of the 12 founding members to avoid any return to conflict. The increasingly aggressive actions of the Soviet Union drove the Government to consider, as he put it,

“how like-minded, neighbourly peoples, whose institutions had been marked down for destruction, could get together, not for the purpose of attack, but in sheer self-defence.”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1949; Vol. 464, c. 2011-2013.]

Bevin was clear that the creation of the alliance was not an aggressive act but was instead about deterrence, a fundamental principle of NATO to this day. The Atlantic treaty was to send a message to potential adversaries that NATO's members were not a number of weak, divided nations, but rather a united front bound together in the common cause of collective self-defence.

James Heappey: Last year, the Labour party leader was asked about article 5 of the NATO treaty and he responded:

“That doesn't necessarily mean sending troops. It means diplomatic, it means economic, it means sanctions, it means a whole range of things.”

Will the hon. Lady clarify from the Dispatch Box now that, if one of our NATO allies were attacked militarily and he were Prime Minister, he would respond with military action?

Nia Griffith: I will confirm that Labour 100% supports NATO and, as the Leader of the Opposition has made absolutely clear, we want to work within it to promote democracy and to project stability. That is exactly what we would do if we were in government.

Dr Murrison: Nobody doubts the hon. Lady's commitment to our armed forces and to NATO, but her leader has one signal virtue, consistency—it is a virtue in a politician. He has not changed his mind on anything since the 1970s. What then are we to make of an individual who only six years ago said that NATO was a “danger to world peace” and that it was “a major problem”?

Nia Griffith: As I have just explained, our leader has been very clear about the position we hold, and he does see that working within NATO is very important for projecting stability and promoting democracy. Let me make some progress now, if I may.

NATO's founding was not meant in any way to undermine or detract from the primacy of the United Nations; rather, it was to work alongside the UN, in full conformity with the principles of the UN charter. The generation that established NATO, the one that endured the horror and destruction of two world wars, were keenly aware of the overriding need to achieve peace and stability wherever possible. When he outlined article 5's implications and its guarantee of collective security, Bevin told the House:

“This does not mean that every time we consult there will be military action. We hope to forestall attack... We have to seek to promote a peaceful settlement.”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1949; Vol. 464, c. 2020-2021.]

Indeed, the principle of settling disputes by peaceful means is articulated clearly in article 1 of the NATO treaty.

Today, the alliance has grown to 29 members and, as well as its central role of ensuring the security of the north Atlantic area, NATO supports global security by working with partners around the world. NATO supported the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Sudan and has worked alongside the European Union's Operation Atalanta to combat piracy in the gulf of Aden off the horn of Africa. NATO offers training, advice and assistance to the Afghan national security forces through the Resolute Support mission. In addition, the NATO training mission in Iraq provides support and mentoring to Iraq's armed forces personnel. The alliance has also assisted with humanitarian relief efforts, including those in Pakistan after the devastating 2005 earthquake and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Russia's recent actions, including its disgraceful and illegal annexation of Crimea and the Donbass in 2014, have led to renewed focus on the immediate security of the alliance area and, indeed, the need to secure NATO's eastern border. At the 2016 Warsaw summit, the allies resolved to establish an enhanced forward presence in the Baltic states and Poland as a means of providing reassurance to those NATO members and a credible deterrent to potential adversaries. The tailored forward presence in the Black sea region makes an important contribution to regional security there.

[*Nia Griffith*]

I have had the privilege of visiting Estonia twice, and I have met our personnel serving there as part of Operation Cabrit. It was clear from our conversations with the Estonians that they truly value our presence there, particularly as they have worked so closely with our personnel in Afghanistan. The Estonians themselves have offered to help another NATO ally, France, with its mission in west Africa. For them, that is about offering reciprocity for the security that NATO allies give them to maintain their freedom in Estonia. They know that the collective protection of NATO is what makes them different from Ukraine.

Although the provision of deterrence through conventional means in Estonia, Poland and Romania is of great importance, we must also be alive to the risk that adversaries, including non-state actors, will increasingly deploy hybrid and cyber-warfare and use destabilising tactics specifically designed not to trigger article 5. We have all heard the reports of how Russia has used cyber-warfare; indeed, when I visited the cyber centre in Estonia, I heard about how Estonia has had direct experience of a cyber-attack that affected major computer networks throughout the country, and about what the staff there did to combat it. That was a reminder that when we reflect on the state of our own defences—as the Government are currently doing with the modernising defence programme—we must bear in mind the need to invest in the whole range of conventional and cyber-capabilities, and not to view it as an either/or situation.

The Warsaw summit communiqué, which set out plans for the enhanced forward presence, also stated that

“deterrence has to be complemented by meaningful dialogue and engagement with Russia, to seek reciprocal transparency and risk reduction.”

Of course, Russia’s aggressive stance, and her repeated assaults on our rules-based international system, have made any productive engagement nigh on impossible. The response to the recent poisonings in Salisbury, for which we hold Russia responsible, demonstrated the strength of the alliance in the face of Russian aggression, with a great number of our allies, and NATO itself, joining us in the expulsion of diplomats. It is none the less positive that the NATO-Russia Council has met recently, because we need to use any and all opportunities for dialogue. What is perhaps most worrying about the current state of affairs is that even at the height of the cold war we maintained lines of communication, which are essential to avoid misunderstandings that can lead to very rapid escalations. There is currently far less engagement.

Our co-operation with allies in Estonia and Poland highlights the importance of the interoperability of our equipment in enabling us to work closely with other NATO members in a variety of settings. That is something that was raised with me when I visited NATO headquarters in Brussels shortly after I took up my post. It was clear that NATO wishes to see greater harmonisation in equipment. Although I recognise that decisions about defence procurement must of course be taken freely by sovereign states, it clearly does make sense to maximise the opportunities to work together and to avoid unnecessary duplication, wherever possible.

Of course the need to invest in the equipment necessary for NATO missions merely adds to the case for proper levels of defence spending. NATO allies are committed to the guideline of spending a minimum of 2% of their GDP on defence, with 20% of that total to be spent on major equipment, including research and development. Only a relatively small number of NATO members can even claim to be hitting the 2% figure at present, and it is right that we encourage all allies to meet the NATO guidelines, as the 2014 Wales summit communiqué made clear.

We must lead by example. The simple fact is that the UK is barely scraping over the line when it comes to our own levels of defence spending. The latest Treasury figures for the year 2015-16 show that the Government spent 1.9% of GDP on defence. The International Institute for Strategic Studies has also concluded that UK defence spending is not reaching 2% of GDP.

The reality is that the UK only appears to meet the 2% in its NATO return because it includes items such as pensions that do not contribute to our defence capabilities, which Labour did not include when we were in government. Whichever way we look at it, the truth is that the deep cuts that were imposed in 2010 and the implementation by the Conservative party of those cuts in the years following mean that the defence budget is now worth far less than it was when Labour left office. Defence spending was cut by nearly £10 billion in real terms between 2010 and 2017, and our purchasing power has been cut dramatically owing to the sharp fall in the value of the pound.

I note that the Minister for defence people, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is no longer in his place, has said recently that he would like to see defence spending rise north of 2.5%. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State could clarify whether this is, in fact, now Government policy, or whether it is simply another plea, which will, doubtless, be rebuffed by the Chancellor.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for all she does in the defence world. I entirely agree with her about pressing the Government to increase our spending to 2.5%, or, as I have often said, to 3%. Will she take this opportunity to commit an incoming Labour Government to doing the same thing?

Nia Griffith: The hon. Gentleman simply needs to look at our record. We consistently spent well over 2% when we were in government. We do have a good record on spending.

I know that there is concern across the House about current levels of defence spending, as the hon. Gentleman has just indicated. The recent findings of the National Audit Office that the equipment plan is simply not affordable, with a funding gap of up to £20.8 billion, will have done nothing to assuage this. As I have said many times, the Government will have support from Labour Members if the modernising defence programme results in proper investment for our defences and our armed forces, but there will be deep disquiet if the review merely results in yet more cuts of the kind that have been briefed in the press in recent months.

The UK’s decision to leave the European Union means that our NATO membership is more important than ever. Although we have always recognised NATO

as the sole organisation for the collective defence of Europe, and defence has always been the sovereign responsibility of each EU member state, it is none the less the case that from March 2019 we will lose our voice and our vote in the EU Foreign Affairs Council and in many other important committees. We must therefore look at other ways of co-ordinating action with European partners where it is in our interests to do so—for example, in defending the Iran nuclear deal, which was so painstakingly negotiated and risks being completely trashed by President Trump.

It is also very important that we retain the position of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe once we have left the EU and that we resist any attempts to allocate that role to another European state. Ultimately, Labour believes very firmly that Brexit must not be an opportunity for the UK to turn inwards, or to shirk our international obligations.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Speaking personally as someone who has worked for the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and been chief of policy at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, I cannot see in any way how anyone could suggest that the Deputy SACEUR could be anything but British as things stands. It has absolutely nothing to do with the European Union.

Nia Griffith: I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to let the hon. Gentleman intervene. We absolutely agree with what he says.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): May I pick up the hon. Lady on the point that she has just made? Like me, does she see the future of our role in Europe as being twofold: first, on defence, with NATO; and secondly, on civil affairs, with the Council of Europe? They were both formed at the same time. They both have similar membership and they both try to do the same thing.

Nia Griffith: The Labour party wants absolute, full co-operation with European partners. We recognise that we are leaving the EU, but in every other respect we want to be fully European. We want to have full co-operation within NATO and the Council of Europe.

We are living in an increasingly unpredictable world, with a very unpredictable—and, at times, isolationist—United States Administration, so it is all the more important that the UK uses its voice.

Mr Francois: I do not know whether the House is aware, but I was born in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), so I ask the hon. Lady: if the right hon. Gentleman were to become Prime Minister, would it be his intention to declare our nuclear deterrent to NATO as it is currently declared?

Nia Griffith: We have made our position on the nuclear deterrent absolutely clear. We support the nuclear deterrent and we support NATO. That is our party policy.

I think that I had just mentioned the isolationist US Administration.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): On that point, there is a huge danger that we spend our time focusing on the President's tweets and not looking at what America is actually doing. Certainly at the moment, its financial

contributions, its people contributions and its commitment to NATO are higher than they have ever been. The support that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly receives from members of Congress such as Mike Turner, Joe Wilson and Jennifer González-Colón is absolutely 100% towards the NATO alliance. It is dangerous to see the US totally through the prism of the President.

Nia Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend not only for the work that she does on behalf of this Parliament in respect of NATO, but for making a very valid point and clarifying exactly the position that we do seem to have at the moment with the United States.

It is all the more important for the UK to use our voice, through organisations such as NATO, to be a force for good in this world. It was the same internationalist outlook that inspired Ernest Bevin when he said:

“In co-operation with like-minded peoples, we shall act as custodians of peace and as determined opponents of aggression, and shall combine our great resources and great scientific and organisational ability, and use them to raise the standard of life for the masses of the people all over the world.”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1949; Vol. 464, c. 2022.]

I sincerely believe that NATO can still be that stabilising influence in an ever-changing world, and a strong and resolute force for the values of democracy and freedom that we cherish.

4.57 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I believe that I am right in saying that this is the third defence debate this year to be held in the main Chamber and if the opening speeches—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman just as he is starting. I had omitted to tell him and the House that there has to be an initial time limit of seven minutes, which will begin not from when the right hon. Gentleman started, but from now.

Dr Lewis: That is very generous of you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

If the opening speeches in this debate are anything to go by, I think that the temperature will be very similar to that of the first two debates and show a welcome unanimity on both sides of the House about the importance of defence investment in peacetime to ensure that we minimise the chances of conflict breaking out.

The shadow Secretary of State referred to the importance of investing in the whole range of conventional capabilities. As far as I can see, that is common ground among all the main parties in this House, even though there are differences of opinion about the nuclear dimension. The difficulty that we face is that defence investment costs a lot of money, and defence inflation has been running ahead of defence investment. As a result, we repeatedly hear phrases such as “hollowing out” and “black holes in the budget”. It was useful that she said that she felt that defence investment, in real terms, had fallen by about £10 billion.

I do not think I am giving away anything more than I should by saying that in a few days' time the Defence Committee will publish a new report entitled, “Indispensable Allies?”, referring to the defence relationship between the United States, the United Kingdom and NATO. In

[Dr Julian Lewis]

that report, we do some calculations and projections about defence investment. We can see that at every level at which we estimate gross domestic product to grow over the next few years, an extra 0.5% of GDP equates, roughly speaking, to £10 billion. That is why when my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) referred to the need to move towards 2.5% or 3% of GDP, we understood the sorts of figures that we are aiming to achieve.

It was slightly unfortunate that when we published our most recent report, “Beyond 2 per cent”, a few days ago, it coincided with the welcome announcement that £20 billion will be found for investment in the national health service. As I said in an intervention, while we obviously welcome the investment that is made in other high-spending Departments, it is important to remember how defence used to compare with those other calls on our Exchequer. At the time of the cold war in the 1980s, which is in the memory of most of us sitting in this House today, we spent roughly the same on health, on education and on defence. Now we spend multiples more on activities other than defence. Indeed, welfare—on which we used to spend 6% in the 1960s, just as we spent 6% on defence at that time—now takes up six times as much of our national wealth as does defence. So it is fairly easy to see that, by any standard of comparison, defence has fallen down the scale of our national priorities.

We have been very focused on Europe today because of the debate that took place immediately prior to this debate. It is worth reminding ourselves of the steps that led to the foundation of NATO. This may come as a slight surprise to some Members, but it actually goes back to the end of 1941, when three small European countries, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands—who had all been overrun by Nazi Germany and whose Foreign Ministers were taking shelter in London—made an approach to the British Foreign Office. They said, “We’ve tried being neutral. We’ve tried keeping out of power politics. It has failed. Our countries have been occupied by brutal aggressors. When this terrible war is over, we want Britain to have permanent military bases on our territory so that we can never be caught out like this again.” It was from that invitation given to the United Kingdom to base military forces in countries that had put their trust in pacifism and neutralism, and had that trust betrayed, that NATO ultimately came into existence.

The Secretary of State began by paying tribute to the people who made the ultimate sacrifice in a time of war. It is certainly the case that when a war breaks out, there is no shortage of people willing to make that sacrifice, and what is more, there is no shortage of money to be invested in fighting and winning that conflict. The question that always faces us is what to do in peacetime. There is a paradox of peacetime preparedness, if Members will excuse the alliteration, which is that we prepare by investing in armed forces that we hope will never be used. That is what we have to do, and it is a difficult battle to fight to persuade people in peacetime to invest money in things that we hope we will not have to send into action.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): In terms of future investment in something that we do not want to have to use, does the right hon. Gentleman

appreciate that some of that future investment could be lost through dollar dependency in the equipment plan, meaning that any additional moneys coming from the Government would be lost and have no long-term benefit?

Dr Lewis: Yes. The hon. Gentleman, who is a valued member of the Defence Committee, has argued that point consistently on the Committee. The Government certainly need to bear that in mind when placing orders for expensive new equipment, at least during a period of uncertainty when there is doubt that the pound will hold its value against another currency.

In conclusion, we have an opportunity in this NATO summit to show that we are leading by example. It was never the case that we were anywhere near the NATO minimum of defence expenditure. It was always the case that we were second only to the Americans. We must try to restore that situation, and that means raising more money for defence and spending more money on defence. Spending 2.5% of GDP will restore us to where we were a few years ago; 3% of GDP should be our target, because only that way can we be ready for the threats that sadly face us today and show no sign whatever of diminishing.

5.6 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is a great shame that the Chancellor, who was lingering by the Speaker’s Chair earlier, did not take the time to join us. As those who normally attend these defence debates will know, we have been desperate to get a Treasury Minister to join us at some point, and we have still not used our collective imagination to deliver that outcome. I am sure he will read *Hansard* as soon as it is off the printers later this evening.

I begin by sincerely commending the Government for bringing this debate forward. Many of us have hoped that the Government would bring a defence debate forward in Government time at some point. We debated a defence-related Bill that was in the Queen’s Speech on the Floor of the House, and there was a broader debate on national security following the Salisbury incident, but it would be useful to have more of these defence debates in Government time where possible. I am sure that those on the Government and shadow French Benches will join me in congratulating NATO on its move to new headquarters and wish it well in its new home.

The upcoming summit carries with it much anticipation. A changing threat landscape could take the alliance, which is so crucial for security, into an uncertain future. Much has been said about an increasingly defiant Russia, and I am sure much will be said about the intemperate words of the United States President. Both those things should motivate member states to unite in solidarity for the sake of the future of the alliance, which does so much to underpin international order and security.

Arguably NATO has not faced a crisis such as this since the end of the cold war. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO was a changing body that had to adapt to a new purpose; it required a new vision to continue being the most successful defence and security alliance in the history of the world. Questions were raised as to whether solidarity could be upheld sans the threat of the Soviet Union; whether new forms of threat

could be met by the north Atlantic alliance; and whether a security and defence alliance of this nature was ever really required at all. Some of those questions still echo in the discourse today, which is why it is important that those of us who believe in institutions such as NATO—and the United Nations Security Council, which is a failing instrument at the moment—continue to make the case for them.

In its longevity, NATO has kept land, sea and airspace safe, but new forms of attack, such as rising cyber-warfare and the horrifying poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March, demonstrate that our security is being threatened by means not explicitly covered by the traditional article 5 definition of attack. Let us take the example of the Skripal attack. The Russian use of a nerve agent on UK soil was a violation of the chemical weapons convention and, of course, of international law. It was a premeditated attack that attempted to kill two people within UK borders. The choice of weapon in itself demonstrates the particular venom of the actor involved. The nerve agent Novichok blocks a crucial enzyme in the nervous system, causing nerves to become over-excited and sending muscles—both internal and external—into spasm. The whole House will rightly have been horrified by what happened in Salisbury in March. That is one example of how the changing threat picture affects us, but of course it is not new to our Baltic allies.

There are also the more traditional threats, some of which were outlined by the Defence Secretary himself. Let us, for example, take the threat of Russian submarine activity, which is now at the highest levels since the days of the cold war. The Secretary of State knows the concerns of SNP Members about the high north and Icelandic gap, but I implore Members not just to think of this as the Scottish bit of the NATO debate, because it would be ill-advised to look at it in that way.

James Gray: The hon. Gentleman knows of my passionate interest in the Arctic. Does he agree with me in very much looking forward to the forthcoming report from the Defence Committee, which I think is nearing completion? It will come out just in time to match the Norwegian report, which I think will come out in September. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will come along to the all-party group for the polar regions, where we will be discussing it.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I pay a genuine and generous tribute to him, as I am sure my SNP colleagues do, for the work he has done in his party and as a member of the Defence Committee to bring attention to that part of the world. It is a seriously testing issue that, to be fair, is understood by the Defence Secretary, and is certainly understood by Sir Stuart Peach and General Sir Nick Carter. I am grateful to the Defence Secretary for taking the time to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) to discuss these issues. We now live in hope that the high north and Icelandic gap will be a prominent feature of the upcoming modernising defence programme.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is heartening to hear the Secretary of State for Defence recognise, in the modernising defence programme,

unlike in previous SDSRs, that this is actually an island and that we are moving forward in the high north and the north Atlantic?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Yes, indeed. In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State mentioned that previous SDSRs made no mention of Russia and, indeed, that the most recent one made no mention of the fact that Britain is an island, and these things really matter.

As I have mentioned, NATO now faces external and internal threats—the latter is wholly unprecedented—but it faces them against the backdrop of an entirely broken United Nations Security Council. It is regrettable that, despite repeated calls from the Opposition Benches urging the Government to knock heads together and return some order to the Security Council, they still do not appear to have done so. What of the internal threat? The US President has long criticised the alliance for the amount that the United States contributes. That has been adumbrated by the Secretary of State, and I take on board the points made by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon). She made a valuable point, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the White House, although I appreciate her expertise as a Member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

It is not a new occurrence that the United States provides almost three quarters of direct contributions to NATO, and a substantial amount of indirect contributions on top of that. This has been a source of ire for the Trump Administration, who have openly accused other member states of not pulling their weight. So all eyes will indeed be on Brussels this month. Will the President come in like a wrecking ball, or will he come in as an opportunist, seeking to improve relations after an incredibly testing G7 summit?

Last week at Defence questions, the Secretary of State emphasised Secretary Mattis's explicit and unwavering commitment to NATO and to European defence. That would be somewhat encouraging if only it were reflected in the discourse of President Trump, who continues to lambast the alliance through the lens of his "America First" politics.

Mrs Moon: There are other dialogues taking place that are equally important. In the last week alone, we have had General Ben Hodges here for the land warfare conference. Lieutenant General Joe Anderson was here, and Admiral Foggo was here as well. So there are other dialogues happening that are equally important. Again, I would caution about the President's tweets, as opposed to what others are actually doing.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The hon. Lady is of course right to put these things on the record, and I recognise exactly what she is saying, but this is not just about Twitter and, as I say, we cannot ignore the White House. These are speeches that the US President has made on the campaign trail and since he assumed office. Given the way in which the President operates, I am sorry to say that everything could change any day. However, I do take the hon. Lady's point—she is absolutely correct.

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. We are incredibly blessed to have such a resolute ally as the United States, and it has been a privilege to work with Defence Secretary Jim Mattis—you

[Gavin Williamson]

could not find an individual who is more committed to the transatlantic alliance. However, it is not just about words; it is about deeds and about investment of over, literally, billions of dollars, which the United States has invested in the defence of Europe. It is important to recognise that.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I take the Secretary of State's point entirely. I had not intended to get so caught up in the Trump issue, but I am grateful for what the Secretary of State says. It would be good to see him forcefully remind the entirety of the Trump Administration—of course there are people in there who are agreeable and who get this sort of stuff—of the importance of the alliance to them and the European continent.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I want to make a bit of progress.

I want to address one other issue that I am sure will be on the lips of many at the upcoming summit, and that is Nord Stream 2. I had the pleasure recently of visiting Ukraine, and I had a series of meetings with politicians, senior civil servants, journalists, and civil society and anti-corruption activists. I would like to pay a generous tribute to the UK personnel working from the embassy out there, led by the ambassador, Judith Gough, who is doing an outstanding job.

Ukraine is, of course, not a NATO state. It is on the frontline of a military and an ideological war—and we should understand that, for Ukraine, it is indeed a war. In just about every one of those meetings, the issue of Nord Stream 2 came up. People want to know why Ukraine's allies are allowing such a project—which would deliver enormous financial and political capital and leverage right into the hands of the Kremlin—to go ahead without much protest.

This is where the Americans have got it right. In so far as I can understand it—I am willing and hoping to be proven wrong by the Government—the UK Government position appears to be that this is a matter entirely for the Germans, the Danes and the Russians. Why are the Government feigning such impotence? Do they really believe that the establishment of Nord Stream 2 has no repercussions beyond those three states? Can they really not see the potential security threat that it so obviously represents to the United Kingdom and the alliance? I implore the Secretary of State, with the support of those on these Benches, to start some robust and frank dialogue with our allies and not to allow this white elephant to turn into a potentially dangerous snake.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I passionately agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Ukrainian Prime Minister has described Nord Stream 2 as a new form of hybrid warfare, and he has said that Nord Stream 1 allowed Russia to renew its military and to finance the invasion of Ukraine. The UK Government cannot remain neutral on this issue.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee is absolutely correct. Do we really believe that the cash from Nord Stream 2

will not go into the financing of far-right political parties all across Europe, even here in the UK? Do we really believe it will not be funding lies and propaganda—we call it fake news—across the EU? Of course it will be.

I want to mention the Chair of the Defence Committee's "Beyond 2 per cent" report, which is a most welcome document. It is clear from that document that the Ministry of Defence is struggling to create a long-term defence plan, partly due to the black hole of up to £20 billion in its equipment plan resulting from a culture of chaos and clumsy procurement decisions that have not been properly funded: a Royal Navy at historically low numbers and recruitment for the Army that is missing targets every single year. It is of paramount importance that that clumsiness does not impact on sufficient burden-sharing for the alliance. Direct contributions should be upheld in the UK, just as they are in any other member state, but indirect contributions should also be provided as a symbol of this country's commitment to a safer and more secure world.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that if the MOD is trying to meet the NATO target, it should not be trying to make it up by double counting money that is also being counted towards international development aid? The Government should be making every effort to meet the 0.7% target and the 2% target separately, with separate funds.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. No one does accounting like the Ministry of Defence. It gets past the 2% line because of pensions and efficiency savings, but the National Audit Office cannot find any evidence that those efficiency savings exist. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

In conclusion, the reason NATO did not collapse along with the Soviet Union in the 1990s is that it adapted to emerging threat landscapes to maintain international security. NATO has demonstrated success in its missions, such as in Kosovo where it saved lives and helped to underpin international order. However, just as after the second world war and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO is now on the brink of a new adaption to secure all of us in the modern age. I have every faith in the alliance to continue operating as the strongest multinational defence institution in history, and I have every hope that the summit next month will begin to tackle threats in a proper and peaceful way. I can only hope that the UK Government will play their proper part.

5.22 pm

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Like the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), I am delighted we are having this debate and that it has attracted such strong attendance. NATO summits, unless we host them ourselves, do not always get the attention they should. I have attended three of them. They are always important, but they are each of them important in their own way. Rather than reminisce, however, I would like to focus on what I think will be important next month.

First, this will be the first opportunity for Britain to set out its view of our security post Brexit. We are leaving our partnership with the European Union, which involves far closer military co-operation inside the European

Union than many people realise. For example, the European Union headquarters at Northwood has been mentioned. We need to be clearer about our ambition and the continuing role we want to play, both on the European continent and beyond. The security partnership document recently published by my right hon. Friends is a very good start, but I hope the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will use the summit as an opportunity to set out their view of our security after we leave the European Union. I hope they might be able to find a way of doing that in harmony.

Secondly, it is worth reminding ourselves that although the Russian threat is very real and has grown, certainly since the 2010 review and even since the 2015 review, we need to continue to take a 360 degree view of NATO. It is worth reminding ourselves that the only time article 5 has been invoked was to help the United States after 9/11. The last time that NATO troops were sent into live military operations in Europe was to help save Muslims in Bosnia. So it is not just the pressure on the eastern frontier. We need to keep looking at NATO security in the round: pressures on the Black sea, on the eastern Mediterranean and from the south. We need to understand that the survival of those very fragile democracies in the Balkans and in the middle east—even in Afghanistan—is just as important for our security here in the west, because if, in the end, they do collapse, we are vulnerable to the spread of transnational terror groups and the threat of mass migration on a scale that we have not yet seen.

Thirdly, on NATO membership, of course we welcomed the accession of Montenegro last year. It is very important that NATO continues to demonstrate that it is open and that there can be no veto on future applications. It is particularly important to the continuing stability of the western Balkans that we show that, provided they meet the proper criteria, there is a route through for those war-torn countries into the alliance.

Fourthly, on resources, there is nothing new about the American President's insistence that European countries pay more—that has been said by every American President throughout my political career, and we should, of course, listen. However, at the Wales summit, four years ago now, we did all commit to the 2%. It is bad enough that only four countries meet the 2%, but what I still find really shocking is that 16 countries—over half the alliance—do not even pay 1.5%, including three of the biggest countries in Europe: Germany, Spain and Italy.

Fifthly, I endorse what my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said about the need to continue to reform NATO—to drive forward the plans to modernise the decision-making structures, to enable the troops, planes and ships to be deployed faster across the continent of Europe, and to make sure that the political decision-making machinery is as equally adept and ready to be triggered.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman talks about readiness and the ability to respond. Does he think now that we ought to review the previous decision to re-base from Germany back into the UK, and that we should actually have a forward presence in Germany?

Sir Michael Fallon: We continued in my time to keep that particular decision under review. There was not a particular year when all the troops were due to come

home, and it was something that we watched particularly carefully as the plans for an enhanced forward presence in Estonia and Poland were developed. It is important, therefore, to be sure about whether the equipment is pre-positioned in the right places and whether it is ready to reinforce in the way that the right hon. Gentleman and I would want.

Finally, I hope that we will find ways beyond this debate of explaining the importance of NATO here at home—of explaining its success since 1949, as well as its obligations—to a new generation who do not, in this country, face conscription, but who are protected day and night by fresh cohorts of marvellous young men and women who step forward to serve in our armed forces. There is a compact there that I believe needs to be better understood. I hope this never happens, but when we next have to send our young men and women into military action wearing the blue beret, I think that we will regret that we did not do more to educate our public about the importance of NATO and the obligations that come with it. That said, I wish my hon. Friends every success at next month's summit.

5.28 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of visiting St Helen's Church in Wakefield for the unveiling of Wakefield Civic Society's plaque to the Grenadier Guards, who were evacuated from Dunkirk and then had the good fortune to be billeted up to Wakefield, where they were fed, watered and patched up, only to be sent back out to fight valiantly in north Africa and at Monte Cassino. It commemorated the moment when a young boy with his dad, walking his dog, listened to the roll call of the people who had been left behind—killed, injured or missing—in Dunkirk. It was a very powerful ceremony.

We also had the unveiling at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park last week of "The Coffin Jump", a new sculptural work of art by Katrina Palmer, in which she celebrates the creation of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. These brave women went out on to the battlefields of world war one on horses to bring back the injured men and to offer them medical assistance. Inscribed on the sculpture is a line of heroic modesty: "nothing special happened".

It is important in this centenary year to remember why NATO exists. It exists to meet new challenges. We know that the new wars will not look like the old wars. I have the pleasure of serving with many Members present in the Chamber on NATO's Parliamentary Assembly, and I serve on the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security. Civilian protection is not a central task of NATO, but since the 1950s the Civil Emergency Planning Committee has existed, and that is what I want to talk about today.

The operations that NATO is engaged in are to meet the new challenges of mass migration, climate change in the high north and Arctic, cyber-security and cyber warfare, and resource stress, with the water, food and energy nexus becoming ever more acute. Tackling disasters, whether natural or human made—clearing up after the disaster of Hurricane Katrina or the earthquake in Kashmir in 2006, providing humanitarian assistance in Kosovo in the late 1990s—is an important part of NATO's soft power that is not talked about or recognised and given the attention it deserves.

[*Mary Creagh*]

One new threat we face is the rise in populism, nationalism and anti-Semitism across Europe along with Russian interference in our democratic processes. Russia is active on the eastern flank, as right hon. and hon. Members have said, and through the annexation of Crimea; we have seen 9,000 deaths in a proxy war in the eastern Ukraine; the UK has had to send 700 troops to Estonia and Poland to protect Europe's eastern flank from Russian aggression; and finally—after several years—we have had the joint investigation team's report into the downing of Malaysian flight MH17 by a Russian anti-aircraft missile fired from the Russian Federation, in which 298 innocent people, 80 of them children, were murdered. Russia must play her part in ensuring that those responsible face justice.

On the eastern flank, we also have Russian aggression with the placing of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad. We have an arc of threat, with Russia active in Syria, on our south-eastern border, supporting the indiscriminate bombardment of civilians and chemical weapons attacks in that country, and in the high north, where it is also active. After the cold war, Russia shut its 64 bases, but it is now reopening them, creating all-weather landing strips, and we know that 20% of Russia's GDP depends on the Arctic, which I know is something the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) has done a great deal of work on. We in this country have seen this hybrid threat from Russia, in the poisoning of Litvinenko in 2006 and in the attack on the Skripals in Salisbury—more state-sponsored terrorism by Russia and the first use of chemical weapons in western Europe since the end of world war two.

We need to think long and hard about our civilian security in this country. The threat permeates our news channels as well. Disinformation campaigns, fake news, cyberbots on social media, even embassies and ambassadors, are being used to create confusion and alternative narratives to those in the mainstream media. In the new information war, tweets are cheaper than tanks. The cold war had rules, but the hybrid war has no rules, no norms, no regulations. It is a dangerous new era for NATO. Cyber-attacks are becoming more destructive and complex, and we know that President Putin wants to go back to the days of large nation states with spheres of influence deciding what smaller nations do. That is not NATO's vision as set out in the partnership for peace announced by Bill Clinton back in the early '90s; its vision is of individual sovereign states making their own decisions.

I want to conclude with the heartbreaking pictures we have seen of little children in camps and the news today that three tender age camps for infants under five have been opened in Texas. At the moment, there is no system for family reunification in those camps. We are seeing a human tragedy of catastrophic proportions unfolding in the nation that is our closest ally, and we have a duty and a responsibility to speak out when we see traumatised children being scarred for life in such conditions.

Europe and our country will not take lessons on immigration from a man who separates children from their parents and by whom they are locked up, weeping; a man who dehumanises those children and their parents as “an infestation”, using language redolent of the Hutu

génocidaires in Rwanda, and who treats their parents as criminals, as if they have broken the law, when they have committed, at most, a civil infraction. He is taking the United States out of the United Nations Human Rights Council, because he only wants human rights for some people some of the time, not for all the people all of the time.

The real danger, however, is that President Trump is a man who does not like multilateralism. We have seen that with the Paris accords, the Iran deal and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and we know that it is a risk for NATO. We must come through that, and the summit must send those messages to President Trump in a clear and unequivocal way.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am reducing the speaking limit to five minutes, so that everyone will be treated equally and everyone will have a chance to speak.

5.36 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who is a member of the United Kingdom delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and it is a great privilege to lead that delegation, whose membership includes former Cabinet Ministers. We have three former Defence Ministers, a former party leader, other former Ministers, and Members of Parliament with a real interest in—and knowledge and experience of—defence issues, including one holder of the Distinguished Service Order. My friend the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) is the deputy leader.

The assembly currently has a key role. Many Members have spoken today of the need to connect people in this country with defence and help them to understand what our relationship with our allies is all about. We have the job of holding NATO to account, informing our fellow parliamentarians—with whom we can discuss many of the issues that we raise in the various committees on which we sit—and also enabling people in this country to understand this great alliance, its values, and its vision for our security. In 2019 we will welcome hundreds of NATO parliamentarians to London, and I look forward to that.

The Royal Air Force was created 100 years ago, as a result of a new technology which had created the first new battlefield for millennia. Today we face the same scenario with the cyber threat. At a recent meeting in this building, we heard from Mark Galeotti, a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague and a renowned Russia expert. He worked with my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), who produced a fascinating paper entitled “A Definition of Contemporary Russian Conflict: How Does the Kremlin Wage War?”

As others have pointed out and as we know ourselves, conventional wars are expensive in terms of both blood and treasure. We know that the cost of one missile that we fire at a building in Syria can run into seven figures, and we know that we are not alone: Russia, too, suffers from unrest as the coffins come home. Cyber is a cheap war to wage, and an effective means of attack: we saw the impact of the NotPetya attack on Ukraine. It is important for us to look at our defence posture in this

day and age, and to consider how we respond to this new battlefield. We have defined our defence in sea, land and air, but we now need a very clear cyber posture as well. We should also follow the advice of Lord Hague, who, in a recent article, referred to a re-evaluation of article 5 of the NATO treaty. That might be something for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take to the Brussels summit.

We need to look carefully at infrastructure as well. Those of us who were cold war warriors will remember that the infrastructure in West Germany was constructed around moving troops very fast, and we know how difficult it has been to establish the Enhanced Forward Presence because of simple factors such as bridges, road widths and border controls.

In the few minutes that I have I want to touch on burden sharing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) made a very important point. The United States is far and away the biggest supporter of the alliance, and we must help NATO-friendly members of Congress by saying precisely as the Secretary of State said earlier: that we recognise that Europe has to step up. We have the benefit of the commitment made at the Wales summit and it is a disgrace, frankly, that some countries are not stepping up to that. My figures are that six countries now do spend over 2%, which is good, and the virtue of that certainly lies with the United States, Britain, Romania, Poland, Greece and the Baltics, but there are laggards and I am going to name them, particularly Belgium and Spain. Belgium has cut its defence spending to below 1%, and I think that is wrong.

Mr Francois: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the circumstances that he has outlined so clearly, there is an even greater responsibility on us in the United Kingdom to try to up our spending to show the Americans that some of the Europeans are playing the game?

Richard Benyon: It is very useful that we have accepted in this debate that the 2% is a floor—not a flaw, I add to help my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax)—and that as the threats change we may have to raise it.

We must be a critical friend of NATO. In terms of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Sir Hugh Bayley's voice is in my head when we talk about trying to hold NATO to account for its failure to produce decent, sensible audited accounts. We have a strength in that regard because we are a significant contributor to the alliance; it enables us to do that.

May I finish by paying tribute to the shadow Secretary of State and those Labour Members who are committed to defence? We must work with them on a bipartisan basis, because I do not want to go into an election in which a party that could enter government does not believe in the value of our alliance, does not believe we should keep our nuclear deterrent, and does not believe that article 5 means what it says. Article 5 is the greatest security that has been delivered to our peoples rich and poor, old and young, down the ages since the horrendous carnage of the second world war. That bipartisan nature of our defence debate is very important now, and I hope we can continue to value NATO now and in the future.

5.42 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said earlier, this debate could have been tabled at any time over the coming weeks, so I wonder whether the Government have allowed this debate to go ahead today in order to make Her Majesty's Opposition feel slightly uncomfortable and to draw the team of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) to the Dispatch Box to talk in glowing terms about an organisation that he clearly does not feel particularly warm towards.

It also obviously serves the Government's agenda to talk about how they do not intend to neglect European security after Brexit, but I cannot but feel that, in this week of all weeks, they may have inadvertently drawn attention to the relationship with the United States. Atlanticism is a noble virtue and no one on these Benches would underestimate the importance of a strong relationship with the United States, but any country's national interest must be dictated by carefully balancing our own interest with those of our allies, which are not always the same. Like the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), I recognise that, while on Capitol Hill there is much support for NATO, the emboldened actions of the Trump Administration, not just last week, have shown us that—just as with Suez, just as with Vietnam, and just as with decolonisation—a UK Government cannot solely rely on the unequivocal support of the United States, no matter how much they may wish it; that is a historical reality.

I have noted this at other times in this place but it bears repeating: every presidential Administration since that of Dwight D. Eisenhower have made European security and integration a major priority. It is with no great relish that I note that the current Administration do not see it as a priority. I rather fear our own Government are simply deciding to hold hands and walk off into an unsure future.

In my party's submission to the modernising defence programme consultation, we made it clear that this Government's commitment to the north Atlantic must be explicitly stated and, dare I say it, that it must be about a lot more than just NATO. I am sure we all agree that, if NATO did not exist, we would have to invent it. So a commitment to NATO must be a commitment to work as closely as possible with those allies around us in the north Atlantic—those countries such as the kingdom of Norway and the kingdom of Denmark whose invasions during the second world war made imperative the existence of NATO, and whose continued existence as sovereign countries has greatly enhanced the international rules-based system that we must continue to protect.

NATO may be—to borrow every Brexiteer's favourite truism—the cornerstone of our security but, from my perspective, the European Union has been the economic and social cement that has held it in place. This of course does not mean that all will fall around us, but it will make for more instability than we require. A state's security is not simply measured by the number of people it can deploy under arms, by how many jets it has or by how many frigates protect its shores. It is also measured in the strength of our economy, the stability of our geographical neighbourhood and the ease with which we can do business there. Let me finish with this appeal to state interest. NATO has served European and Atlantic

[*Martin Docherty-Hughes*]

security extremely well over the last 70 years, and I fear that we are going to need it even more in future. Let us also remember that simply to praise its name is no substitute for understanding why the north Atlantic treaty was signed all those years ago.

5.46 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate this afternoon. May I just clear up one point on my use of the word “flaw” at the start of the debate, which my great friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), picked me up on a moment ago? When I used the word in response to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Defence, I meant that the 2% that we pay was, in my view, flawed and that I think that we should put more into defence—perhaps 3% or more. In my day—I served between 1978 and 1987—it was about 5% or 5.5%. The kit that we have now is more expensive to maintain, as are our soldiers, sailors and airmen, so, logically, we need more money to put into the defence of our country.

I have only a few minutes, but I would like to start by mentioning a wonderful film, “Darkest Hour”, which I am sure most people in this House have seen. There were two moments in the film that brought a lump to my throat. The first was when Kenneth Branagh, acting as the commander at the end of the pontoon, was waiting for deliverance from the beaches when he thought the German tanks were going to storm through and slaughter our men. He and a senior British Army officer were standing together, desolate and alone, surrounded by the enemy and with the end perhaps only minutes away. Then, out of the mist came the little boats. If I recall correctly, as the boats broke through the mist, the Army colonel turned to Kenneth Branagh and said, “What’s that?” Kenneth Branagh turned to him and said, “That’s home.” My God, that hit me! The point I am making is that we were absolutely alone, facing invasion by the Germans, followed by possible submission and all the horrors that would have followed. For those serving, both politically and militarily, in those days, I can only imagine the sheer agony of those moments when we stood alone. But, as the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) said, since NATO was established in 1949, we have not been alone.

I would also like to talk about our relationship with the EU. A point that is often made by those who are opposed to our leaving, or who object to it for one reason or another, is that we are somehow going to desert Europe. I want to touch on something that happened when I was campaigning before the last election. A Frenchman about my age came charging out of his house in a village in my constituency, and he was extremely aggrieved. As I am sure most people know, I am a Brexiteer and campaigned to leave the EU during the referendum. The man came up to me and verbally assaulted me in a particularly unpleasant way, so I let him have his say. He then calmed down, so I stood back and said, “Have you now finished, sir?” He was breathless and said, “Yes. I’ve had my say.” I said to him, “What is the definition of a good friend? A really good friend.” He said, “I’m not sure that I understand what you are getting at.” I said, “For example, if something goes wrong—a divorce or whatever it may be—a true friend

stands by the man or woman, or if something else goes wrong in your life, your friends stand by you. Is that the definition of a good friend?” He said, “Yes.” So, I said, “Who was with you on those beaches? Who was on the beaches four years later, along with our American, Canadian and other allies? Who gave you your freedom back?” At that point, he completely collapsed, and we left as good friends.

That is how I see our future relationship with our European friends and allies. There will be no difference between us. We will stand with them and fight evil and fight for freedom, as this country always has. We do not need to be in a super-state to do that. We need to be in charge of our own destiny and in control of our own armed forces. We need to have MPs elected to make difficult choices about whether to send our troops into battle if needs be. Whenever France, Germany or any other member of the European Union is in trouble—there have been many recent occurrences when they have been—where will Great Britain be? Right by their side. I hope that I have made my point.

5.51 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It is wonderful to see how many right hon. and hon. Members have turned up for this debate, and I want to use the brief time available to me to consider the political threats. We have talked a lot about the military threats to the alliance, but we need to address a particular political threat, and I am not just talking about the rise of populist politicians and political parties that is straining the trust between NATO members and the accepted common values and aspirations across the alliance, which is a real threat. We must remember that we live in democracies, and democracies sometimes throw up leaders with whom we perhaps do not agree and whom we sometimes strongly oppose, but the point of a democracy is that, within the establishment of a Parliament, there is an opportunity for likeminded people to come together to discuss, debate and demonstrate a different way forward. That is what the NATO Parliamentary Assembly gives to us all.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) talked about the European Union. In this place, we often mistakenly say that the European Union and NATO are separate entities, but they are becoming increasingly close. That closer alignment is being complicated by political decisions within the individual members of the alliance, by Brexit, by the refugee and migrant crisis and by different domestic political priorities and coalition tensions. We must not forget that.

More importantly, however, we must address the disaffection of our own population. Canada did a poll recently with Ipsos MORI and found that only 40% of the population understood what NATO was, that 71% of women had no understanding of the NATO mission and that 71% of millennials were unaware of what NATO is. I am a member of a NATO working group that wrote to member states to ask how, and in what subjects, the role of NATO in the defence and security of the Atlantic alliance is taught in schools. Only 18 countries replied, and the UK was not one of them. The UK could not spell out how we do it. We are writing again, and I hope the Minister will join me in making sure that the Department for Education responds and looks at the issue.

We found that there is definitely an east-west divide. In the western part of the alliance, there is a lower understanding of NATO, which is taught as if it is a history lesson only about the cold war. Estonia, in contrast, teaches global security and NATO in an elective course on national defence and has a new course on cyber-defence in its schools. Latvia includes security matters in social sciences, and it distributes information packages to schools and libraries explaining the myths about NATO. The Lithuanian Ministry of Defence has an education programme on national security and defence devoted to NATO. And in Poland, core curricula at primary and secondary schools teach issues related to security and defence.

Mary Creagh: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's brilliant leadership in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and to the work she does there. Does she agree that a brief history of NATO would be a more useful addition to the GCSE history curriculum than the current subjects: crime and punishment and the history of Britain's great houses?

Mrs Moon: I hope that people in the Department for Education are listening to my hon. Friend, because it is essential that we reawaken the British public's understanding of the nature of the threats we face. We have taken our security for granted, and too many of our citizens no longer see the risks and, indeed, no longer trust their Government to accurately portray the risks to them. That has been fertile ground for Russian disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks. In fact, in some respects, the most horrific thing about the attack in Salisbury is how many people have said to me, "Oh, it was MI6." They actually believe we carried out an attack on our own soil, on ourselves. We have to wake up to that and we have to deal with it.

The alliance is very good at addressing military weaknesses, but we are not very good at looking at how we ensure we take our populations with us. The disaffection of our public, their lack of recognition of the infiltration of our social media and cyber, and the attacks on our values, our politics and our alliance must be dealt with. We cannot carry on like this. We are like the frog in the water, and there is a risk we are not noticing that the heat is rising.

In relation to Brexit, our priority must be for the UK to reassure our allies not only of our total commitment but of our enhanced commitment to the NATO alliance, and that we will remain a strong, effective and committed partner. Finally—

Mr Speaker: Order.

Richard Drax: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Forgive me, but I have misled the House. In my speech I referred to the scene of a movie and I said it was "Darkest Hour." That is not true; I was actually referring to "Dunkirk."

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his clarification and for his characteristic courtesy in setting the record straight through the device of a point of order, and it has been noted by the House.

5.58 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): For the record, they are both great movies.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon). She always speaks on these matters with great common sense, and her speech this afternoon is no exception.

In March 2018, the Defence Committee paid a visit to the United States of America, as part of which we held meetings in the Pentagon and the State Department, with some of our opposite numbers on the House Armed Services Committee and with the staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee, too. During our visit we experienced a great deal of American interest in what one might call the "Baltic states scenario." Many of our interlocutors placed a strong emphasis on the readiness of US, European and NATO forces to respond to potential aggression against the Baltic states from a resurgent Russia. That raises the question: what might an assault on the Baltics look like? The Russian annexation of Crimea and de facto invasion of parts of eastern Ukraine provide at least some pointers towards what we might expect to see in the event of Russian adventurism and an attempt to intervene in the Baltics. If that were to come to pass, we could expect to see multiple elements of so-called "hybrid warfare" employed by Russia.

To begin with, any such assault might contain an element of maskirovka—strategic deception—perhaps by seeking to draw NATO's attention away from the area prior to intervention, for instance, by creating a crisis in the Balkans. That might well be accompanied by the agitation of Russian minorities in the three Baltic states, where they represent approximately a quarter of the Latvian population, a quarter of the Estonian population and an eighth of the Lithuanian population respectively.

Richard Benyon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this has already been trained for? There have already been cyber-attacks on countries such as Estonia, which have locked down many of their public services. So this is happening.

Mr Francois: My right hon. Friend is right about that, and it is no mistake that NATO's centre of excellence on cyber-warfare is now located in Estonia.

As I was saying, such an attack would no doubt be accompanied by a considerable disinformation campaign, the widespread employment of deception and fake news, and quite possibly the appearance of large numbers of "little green men", as we saw in both Crimea and Ukraine, perhaps under the guise of so-called "local defence units". That would very likely be accompanied by Spetsnaz and other special forces activity, potentially backed up by airborne or air assault forces. It is worth noting that the Russian 76th guards air assault division, based at Pskov, is located only 100 km from the Estonian border.

Any such intervention would probably be covered by a wide-reaching air defence umbrella, including highly capable air defence systems, such as the S300 and S400, to help establish an anti-access area denial—or A2/AD—shield, designed specifically to prevent NATO air power from intervening. In any such scenario, speed would be of the essence, as we saw in Crimea, where the key elements of annexation were effectively carried out in a matter of days. Russia's likely aim would be to present NATO with a fait accompli, to undermine the article 5 guarantee, which Russia would no doubt regard as a meaningful victory.

[Mr Francois]

How should we best respond to this? In May, the Select Committee took evidence from the Secretary of State for Defence, who is in his place, including on our readiness in the UK to respond to a Baltic scenario. He explained that our two high readiness formations, 16 Air Assault Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade, could be deployed to the Baltics in a matter of days, although it would have to be by air and therefore assumes that air heads would still be in friendly hands. In response to questions, he further explained that it would take about 20 days to deploy a mechanised brigade, whereas to deploy a full war fighting division, as envisaged in SDSR 2015, would take about three months, by which time the conflict could very well be all over. It is obvious from those timings that we would need our NATO allies, especially US air power, to seek to hold the ring until heavier reinforcements could arrive.

What is to be done? First, NATO would have to be prepared to fight and win an intense information campaign, in which television cameras would arguably be more powerful than missiles. The Skripal case showed that in fact the west was prepared to stand together quite impressively in response to Russian misinformation, expelling more than 100 Russian diplomats. I believe that really hurt the Russians.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the era of hybrid warfare and conflict in front of cameras, it is more important than ever that our service personnel feel that if they make difficult decisions in the moment they will be protected through their lives? I raise this because of the intrusion of cameras in conflict.

Mr Speaker: May I gently say that the time limit will have to be reduced for subsequent speakers at this rate? I say that not by way of complaint, but as a piece of information to the House.

Mr Francois: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In fairness, I understand that the Secretary of State is looking into what can be done on legacy investigations.

Secondly, NATO needs to improve its logistics and its ability to move assets, including heavy armour, to the Baltics in a timely manner. The UK has expressed particular interest in one of the 17 EU projects under PESCO—the permanent structured co-operation framework—specifically, the initiative to look at military mobility across Europe. Would it be worth establishing a NATO stock of flat-bed railway cars that European armies could share to move forces across Europe more quickly?

Thirdly, we need to enhance our collective forward presence by having more countries take part in the rotation of units to share the burden. Importantly, we also need more air defence units in that capacity. As has already been suggested, we may also wish to review our basing of units in Germany, because by remaining there they could have a considerable deterrent effect.

Fourthly, NATO should consider devolving to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe—SACEUR—the authority to sanction precautionary troop movements in a crisis, even when unanimous authority from the NATO ministerial council may not be forthcoming.

That was much the case during the cold war, and we may have to re-learn that lesson in the protection of the Baltics.

In summary, as I argued earlier, in response to an act of aggression in Salisbury, the west showed admirable determination and collective will to stand up to Russia. We now need a similar combination of determination, backed up by sound military planning, to effectively deter aggression against NATO's eastern flank. I hope that we will see evidence of all that at the summit in July.

6.6 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): NATO was one of the great achievements of the 1945 Labour Government. Its creation was pushed through by the tenacity and force of will of Ernie Bevin and Clem Attlee, who had both lived through two world wars—Attlee was wounded at Gallipoli. The creation of NATO was based on our party's fundamental principles of international co-operation and internationalism, and on the idea of solidarity with other nations. Irrespective of the people who today try to rewrite history, the Labour party has never been a pacifist party. NATO was put in place with the idea that pooling resources to ensure that nations could come together and take a collective approach to defence was the way forward. That idea has passed the test of the past 70 years.

When NATO was founded, the threat was clearly the Soviet Union, as it was right up until the 1990s, and it proved to work well as a deterrent. There is a narrative that says that NATO is now somehow the aggressor. I ask people to cast their minds back to the late 1990s, when NATO was in the driving seat in respect of co-operation with the new Russian state, with the "Partnership for Peace" process and the NATO-Russia Council. People forget that at the 2000 Moscow summit, Putin actually suggested to Bill Clinton that Russia could become part of NATO. There was a great will to ensure that co-operation and peace could move forward.

We live in a very different world today, with a resurgent Russia. Not only is there the cyber-threat, about which Members have spoken eloquently, but Russia is re-arming in respect of its nuclear capability, naval capacity and long-range nuclear missiles. People might ask what NATO's response to those threats is. Our response has to be the traditional one of preparation and solidarity, and we need to ensure that we have a united front against any threat, including that from Russia.

We saw in the press a couple of weeks ago the cynical, terrible situation whereby the new weapons that are being developed are being test-bedded on the people of Syria. Anyone who tries to tell me that that is a state that is going to look for a peaceful way forward need only ask the people of Crimea to see what its way forward is. The threats are different now, though, and it is not just about Russia; the threats include Islamist terrorism, failed states and, as has already been mentioned, mass migration and economic disintegration in parts of the world.

Our response has to include—I know that this has already been said—spending, modernisation and ensuring that we deal with the threats that we face, not just on the battlefield, but in cyber-space and in the media. The Russian threat is quite clearly designed in doctrinal

terms to destabilise the western alliance and it is one to which we need to react. I think that we have been rather slow in reacting to it.

May I also add to what was said by the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and make the case for NATO? Most of us who grew up in the cold war really knew what NATO was for. We need to re-emphasise the case for why we need it today—not as an aggressive alliance, but as a body that stands up for the values that we all cherish dearly and have fought for over many generations in this country. I also reiterate the point that Labour is a party that looks outwards, believes in international co-operation, is not pacifist, stands up to aggression where we see it and also works with other nations to ensure that peace and democracy, which we all take for granted, are preserved.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am afraid that a four-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches now applies.

6.10 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): As many other Members have said, I regret that the Chancellor is absent today, because I would have liked him to hear some of this. Let me crack on. I am very grateful that we are having this debate today because I know that the organisation has done so much—arguably more than the EU ever has—to secure peace in Europe. NATO is a guarantor of peace in Europe. I agree with the position of Veterans for Britain, which argues that the EU is a consequence of, rather than a cause of, European peace.

I have grown up and, arguably, grown pretty old with the protection of NATO. I can well recall hearing those chilling siren practices that used to be held back in the 1950s in case of nuclear attack. I believe that NATO kept us secure then and continues to do so now. I am, therefore, a very keen supporter of NATO, and am delighted to see that it goes from strength to strength, which is exemplified by the upcoming summit in Brussels.

All of the advances that will happen in Brussels are a direct response to the growing threat from Russia, but we must be mindful that Russia is not necessarily the only threat that we face. Flexibility in this matter is important. We should celebrate our unity, because, as laid out in article 5, if one of us is threatened, all of us are threatened. That is the basis of NATO. Although we should be proud of our contribution in the past, we must now step up to the plate and be prepared to take a more significant role in NATO post Brexit. In order to do that, we must boost our defence expenditure towards the 3% of GDP target that the Defence Committee recommended this week.

I know that the Minister will seek to reassure me that the 2% commitment is a floor, not a ceiling, but we must pick our hard-working armed forces up off that floor and, in doing so, show them that we appreciate them and that we will address the financial challenges that they have been facing for far too long. This is as much a question of morale as it is of military and cyber hardware. My visit earlier this year to Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose showed me that. The personnel there were a fantastic determined group of people who were operating from a base that an estate agent might describe as in need of TLC—and we all know what that means. That is what I found at Culdrose.

We must maintain our status as a credible military power, because we are currently in danger of stalling instead of accelerating. If we do not accelerate, the world will become a more dangerous place. The disarmament and appeasement of the 1930s showed us that. What is more, the additional resources are necessary to keep this country safe. I will bug out now with a minute to spare, Mr Speaker.

6.14 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I remind the Chamber once again that I have a child who is a serving officer in our armed forces.

I crave your indulgence, Mr Speaker, so that I may share a short memory with the Chamber. When I was at school in the highlands, my parents went away for some days and I was sent to stay with two elderly ladies called Miss Dorothy Mackenzie and Miss Catherine Mackenzie. One day—I remember that it was March—I came back from my day school to find the two old ladies in tears. I was very embarrassed about this. There on the table was a yellowing cutting from the *Ross-shire Journal*, announcing the death of their brother, who had died in March 1918 in the Germans' last big push. He went to Tain Royal Academy, and went from there to Fettes, the alma mater of one Anthony Blair. After that, he won an exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford—a spectacular entry to higher education. In fact, he entered Balliol higher up than a much better known graduate of the college: one Harold Macmillan, who graced these Benches.

I was extraordinarily embarrassed by these old ladies, but the experience taught me a very sharp lesson about the reality of losing a sibling in war. Now that I am the age that I am, those school days are actually longer ago than the memory of the ladies' brother was to them. They still saw him as the young man with that great future before him, who might one day walk in and say hello. I tell this tale because it reminds me that we in Europe were killing one another for hundreds of years. That is why, as has already been said, membership of NATO has never been more important when it comes to these relations. We should not forget that.

I am glad just to have this opportunity. I am lucky to be here to tell this tale and to honour the memory of a brave man in *Hansard*, which is about the best thing I can do.

I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). I represent a constituency at the top of Scotland, and I often wonder which Russian naval vessels are there, beyond the horizon. The right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), who is no longer in his place, puts it extremely well indeed; we have an absolute duty to sell to our constituents, particularly the younger generation, what NATO is about and why it is crucial that we are a member, and why—yes, I agree with other hon. Members—we should increase our expenditure on the defence of this country.

6.16 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): NATO would simply be too slow to defend against a Russian force in somewhere like Estonia or Latvia. The Russians would beat us to the draw. The alliance's much quoted article 5 is, in fact, a commitment to consult, but not a commitment to act.

[Bob Stewart]

I wonder how long such a decision might take, and that would be before we deployed one single person, apart from possibly the high readiness force.

Since 2014, NATO has established this very high readiness taskforce, which our 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade currently leads. But I am very suspicious of words in military titles such as “very high readiness”. I reckon that it is a case of wishful thinking. This organisation deploys at the speed of a striking slug. A RAND study in 2016 concluded that the Russians would sweep through the Baltic states within 60 hours, which is about the time that the very high readiness taskforce would be thinking about getting on its transport to go to the Baltics.

It is good that NATO has four multinational battlegroups: in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. We are the lead nation in Estonia, with a battlegroup headquarters and troops, and we also contribute a company group in Poland. But these forces are a trip wire, like my battalion was in 1970 to 1972 in Berlin, when we were surrounded by the East Germans and the Russians. They are obviously hostages to fortune. An attack on them should trigger NATO action.

I am a big supporter of NATO. It binds 28 states together and gives us common purpose. But in any high intensity war, NATO would have to change hugely. It is not good enough to fight at the moment, and it would have to change very fast indeed if it were actually to do the very dirty business of killing the enemy and winning the war.

6.20 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I am really grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate ahead of the NATO summit in Brussels in a few weeks’ time. Now is also an opportune time to make clear to our NATO allies the importance of strengthening the collective maritime strategy.

With much military activity off the coast of Scotland, now at levels not seen since the cold war, it is imperative that we put a renewed focus on our security interests in the high north. As the Defence Secretary acknowledged during an evidence session in the Defence Committee on 22 May, we are seeing much more activity in the high north. Indeed, the Royal United Services Institute, in its 2017 paper “NATO and the North Atlantic”, issued a warning that

“the North Atlantic—and in particular the Arctic—is an increasingly important part of Russian military strategic calculation, as evidenced by its growing defence modernisation efforts as well as naval and air prowess. It is therefore essential that the North Atlantic region comes to be seen as being central to NATO’s own strategic interests and be a recipient of more NATO assets.”

Despite such warnings, there was no mention whatsoever of the north Atlantic and the high north in the 2015 strategic defence and security review. This is a poor reflection on the UK Government’s ability to effectively prioritise and plan our future security requirements. The new modernising defence programme must address this issue to ensure that we are fully protected against rising Russian threats in this area. Not only that, but we need to protect our oil and gas interests, underwater cabling, renewable energy and fishing, as well as the new and increasingly important tourist activity in the Arctic as it becomes a much more interesting destination for many tourists.

In 2010, the then Defence Secretary, the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), decided to scrap the RAF’s Nimrod maritime surveillance fleet, severely constraining our ability to locate Russian submarines off the coast of Scotland. That decision was remarkably reckless and left the UK in a tremendously weak position at one of its most vulnerable frontiers. We have had no choice but to allow others to pick up the slack, such as the Americans, the French, the Norwegians and the Canadians, who have had maritime patrol aircraft entering UK airspace in recent years. At the end of last year, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach warned that

“our anti-submarine warfare capability has been seriously neglected” due to underfunding. He urged the UK to

“develop our maritime forces with our allies to match Russian fleet modernisation.”

Yet we are still waiting for the full P8 fleet to be delivered. The UK’s lack of maritime patrol aircraft is both embarrassing and dangerous. This must change and change soon.

Scotland is strategically located to host the new NATO maritime command base. Scotland’s proximity and accessibility to the north Atlantic makes it a prime location to form a vital link between western Europe and North America, and to cover the Greenland-Iceland-Shetland gap. I conveyed my views on this proposal to the Minister for Europe and the Americas during my Westminster Hall debate on the appointment of an Arctic ambassador last November, and I make the case again today. The east of Scotland is by far the best option for a new base. I hope that the Secretary of State will make such representations to our allies at the NATO summit in July. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that commitment.

I urge the Secretary of State to work with our NATO allies at the Brussels summit to rethink our collective defence and to put a renewed maritime strategy at the top of the NATO agenda.

6.24 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, in which there has been such agreement on the importance of NATO’s contribution to the world since its formation nearly 70 years ago.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been the pivotal organisation and the bond that has held together the freedom-loving nations of Europe and North America, maintained peace in the west of our continent and contributed to peacekeeping and nation-building exercises around the world. In many ways, its name is something of a misnomer, for as we sit here today, there is not an inhabited continent on this earth—from the plains of Afghanistan to the Balkans or the seas off east Africa—that does not have some form of NATO or NATO allies present, enhancing the security of the region and defending our common interests.

As has been said, the threats that face our country and our allies are increasing in scale and scope. In 1946, three years before NATO was formed but in a speech that certainly encouraged the Truman Administration to commit to sharing the burden of keeping Europe whole, free and at peace, Churchill famously spoke of the iron curtain descending across Europe, of the then Soviet sphere and of increasing measures of control

from Moscow. Today, although the aggressor remains, the threats have evolved, not to the exclusion of conventional warfare as we know it—the experiences of Ukraine and Crimea are testament to that—but with the added constant state of cyber and information warfare permanently raging around us. That is a war we cannot afford to lose.

Once again, it is clear that a shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lightened. Countries that for almost three decades were thought to be free from outside control and free to determine their own destiny in Europe and the world face the threat of political interference, propaganda and ultimately invasion from the east once again. NATO, the transatlantic alliance and the special relationship not just between ourselves and the United States but between all the free and democratic countries of Europe and the United States are needed more than ever before.

One, of course, can understand the frustrations of the United States. It has contributed more than any country to the peace and security of a continent that, in the last century, cost it nothing but blood and money. Churchill remarked in that same speech in Missouri all those years ago that twice in his lifetime he saw America send several million of its young men across the Atlantic to fight the war against its own wishes and traditions. The American people today, having witnessed nearly a decade of constant war and of caskets returning from far-flung corners of the globe, of course wonder why it is fair that they contribute so much in dollars and men and women to an organisation in which, of 29 members, with all but two on the continent that it was created to defend, only five contribute anything like the 2% of GDP spend on defence required, when the United States, in contrast, contributes 70% of NATO's budget on its own.

In response to that, I would turn back to the speech in Illinois in 1946. Churchill, in trying to convince another reluctant US President about the merits of collective defence, said that America, while having awesome power, also has

“an awe inspiring accountability to the future.”

It is vital that America must not feel that sense of duty alone. Sadly, too often, in its contribution to a peaceful Europe and the defence of our common interests around the world, America has felt that alone. Two years after Churchill's speech, President Truman said, on the signing of the Brussels treaty:

“I am sure that the determination of the free countries of Europe to protect themselves will be matched by an equal determination on our part to help them do so.”

It is time that the free nations of Europe recaptured that spirit and recommitted themselves to spending what is required to defend themselves. Now, more than at any time since the cold war, Europe needs NATO, and it is up to us to make that case to our allies.

6.27 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): This has been an incredibly important and well-informed debate. The Secretary of State and the British Government should know, when they go to the summit, that they have the full support of this Parliament, as we are united in the belief that NATO forms the cornerstone of the defence of our nation.

Notwithstanding the appalling scenes we have seen in America that none of us could or would seek to defend, it is so important that the US is given the credit it deserves for the work it does to defend the security of our continent and the world. The Secretary-General of NATO, Mr Stoltenberg, wrote yesterday in the paper:

“In fact, since coming to office, the Trump administration has increased funding for the US presence in Europe by 40%. The last US battle tank left Europe in 2013 but now they're back in the form of a whole new US armoured brigade.”

That is the sort of thing my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) was talking about. It does not seek to justify the American President or defend what he is doing in America, but it points to the facts of what not only the President but the generals and the armed forces of the United States are doing to work with us to secure our freedoms.

I say to the Secretary of State, and I make no apology for this, that this House is united in saying to him that whatever the arguments—about 2%, 2.3% and 2.5%, or about who is doing what and who is not—the fact is that our country needs to spend more on its defence and more resources are needed. As I have said in previous debates, as a Labour politician, I say to the Secretary of State that I support him, as my Front Benchers do, in seeking more resources from the Treasury. That should not of course be at the expense of the health service or of schools, but it does mean that we have to find such resources to defend our country.

Let me say that there will be significant challenges at the upcoming NATO summit. I do not have the time to go through them all, but let me tell the Secretary of State about one of them. Article 5—collective defence—is fundamental to the principle of NATO, but does it apply to cyber-warfare? As Lord Jopling has said, does there need to be a new article 5B? These are immense issues for NATO to consider at its summit.

In the half a minute or so that I have left, I say to the Secretary of State that we are losing the battle with the British public about why we should spend more money on defence and about what threats our country faces. My constituents do not believe that they face a threat of attack from Russia. They do not believe that Russian submarines coming into the North sea adjacent to Scotland are a threat, but we have to persuade them that it is a threat. We have to explain what is going on and why it is a threat. They see terrorism as a threat, but they have to understand NATO's purpose and what threats we face. How we explain that to them will determine whether we get more resources.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. If the remaining speakers on my list speak for a little short of four minutes, Mr Thomson would also have a chance. I appeal to your natural generosity of spirit. I call Mr Alec Shelbrooke.

6.31 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): This has been a very wide-ranging and cross-party debate, with Members agreeing on many areas. In the brief time I have, I want to raise one issue that worries me immensely about the future of NATO and how it operates. We will need more time on the Floor of the House for this, which I will seek from the Leader of the House during

[Alec Shelbrooke]

business questions at some point. It is the issue of PESCO—the permanent structured co-operation of the European Union.

There must be an honest conversation, in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at least, about how NATO's command and control structures will actually work given the adoption of PESCO, which was signed on 11 December 2017. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made a point about how long it would take to get a security force into the Baltic states, but that is not actually what NATO is for. It is there as a reinforcement force, and a state should be able to hold the line for 72 hours before NATO comes in and defends it, although that is probably not long enough.

As I see it, there is a problem with PESCO. I urge colleagues to go away and read article 42 of the Lisbon treaty. Specifically, it says of

“a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides”,

that the Council

“shall in that case recommend to the Member States the adoption of such a decision in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.”

The phrase “their respective constitutional requirements” creates one of the problems in that constitutionally, in German law, Germany cannot be part of an aggressive pact. There are therefore question marks in relation to the operation of PESCO.

PESCO seeks to do many of the things that people recognise that NATO should do, including purchasing equipment efficiently and using it in the best way, but that actually clashes with the constitutional restraints on some NATO states. If the argument for PESCO is about having a European border force, are all European nations going to sign up to it in a way that means they will enforce the direction the Italians are now going in?

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Alec Shelbrooke: I will not give way.

I believe we need at a future date to spend time in the House discussing the relationship between PESCO and NATO in order to advise the NATO Parliamentary Assembly how to take this forward.

Mr Speaker: That is extremely generous of the hon. Gentleman.

6.34 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): We have got towards the end of a defence debate, with all the defence family here, and no one has said the word “Plymouth”, so it seems only appropriate that I should rise to my feet and talk about Plymouth.

First, however, I want Members to cast their minds back a few years. Before I was the wonderful silver fox that Members see in front of them, I had brown hair, and back in 2004 I was at the NATO summit in Istanbul. It was there that my real affection for NATO was formed and that I understood how important it is that we co-operate across borders and are ready to face the threats coming our way.

Warfare is changing—no one is denying that it is changing—and we must keep an eye on the future. NATO needs to be flexible and adaptable, but if I am honest, it has been too hard and too structured to respond to some of its needs. It was too inflexible after the terrorist threats we saw from 2001 onwards, and it is still a little too inflexible. To return to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) made, it does not seem able to cope with understanding how hybrid warfare and online and cyber-threats face us as an alliance, and it needs to.

We know that there is increased Russian activity threatening the alliance. We know that there is a very real risk of Russian cyber-attacks in the UK, and there have been such attacks on our NATO allies. However, article 5 has not been triggered, which means that we are in this limbo land, where the Russians are getting away with these things, but if we were using the tactics prevalent 100 years ago, they would have been in a conflict. We need to understand that threat.

As well as understanding what is being done with hybrid warfare to destabilise our allies, we need to understand the use of drones and swarm warfare, which Russia is practising and using in Syria, as well as the increase in its military activities elsewhere and in the weaponising of migration.

We need to keep an eye on our high-end capabilities. In particular, I want briefly to talk about the maritime role. In Devonport, we have a world-class dockyard, a world-class naval base and skills that we really need. With increased Russian submarine activity in the north Atlantic, the anti-submarine warfare of the Type 23s and the Type 26s, which I hope those on the Government Front Bench will announce are coming to Devonport shortly, is absolutely essential, as is understanding how we can counter the rise in Russian surface fleet activity and under-sea cable spy ships, which are an increasing threat, but which are not often spoken about in this place.

We also need to protect our amphibious capabilities. The UK has fantastic amphibious capability in Albion, Bulwark and the Royal Marines, and we need to make sure that that is protected in the modernising defence review that is coming. In terms of the ministerial assurances that Albion and Bulwark will go out of service in 2033 and 2034, I hope that that commitment will be maintained in the modernising defence review, when it is published next month.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) *rose*—

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Because the hon. Lady was on the list, I will call Carol Monaghan next, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will be accommodated.

6.37 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): We have heard already this afternoon that Russian activity in the high north and the Black sea has reached levels not seen since the cold war. The NATO summit must be used to discuss and strengthen the alliance's maritime strategy. The Russian activity off Scotland's west coast is now at critical level. Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach has warned that British anti-submarine capability has been seriously neglected due to underfunding.

The scrapping of the Nimrod fleet in 2010 has left us unable to react to the emerging Russian threat. We must ensure that we, as a NATO member, remain agile enough to respond to future threats, wherever and whatever they may be.

I was in Romania recently as part of a parliamentary delegation, and concerns were raised repeatedly about Russian activity in the Black sea. The annexation of Crimea has given Russia a launch platform in the Black sea, which has already enabled it to intensify air and sea activities in the area. That, of course, is also a threat to oil and gas pipelines.

Romania is grateful that the UK has sent Typhoons to the Black sea as part of the NATO mission, but Russia continues to flex its muscles in the Ukraine and northern Moldova. It courts NATO members in the Balkans and Turkey, and floods other eastern European countries with propaganda.

Romania is pressing for the Black sea to be a specific agenda item at the summit. That, however, has been repeatedly blocked by Turkey—a NATO member that is getting far too close to Russia. I urge the Secretary of State to support Romania's calls for a frank discussion of the Black sea at the summit.

Finally, I echo the comments from the hon. Members for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and for Gedling (Vernon Coaker). Many Members have viewed with horror the pictures of children who have been cruelly ripped from their parents' arms. Their cries and distress will be hard for us to forget, and this pernicious policy has no place anywhere in the world. I urge the Secretary of State to use any influence he has as a fellow NATO member to send a clear message to President Trump that his actions are not endorsed by the Bible, that we in the UK unequivocally condemn them and that children should never be used as pawns in a political game.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) could confine himself to four minutes or less, that would be appreciated by the House. I call Ross Thomson.

6.39 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): NATO was born during the cold war when signatories to the treaty were united by their fear of Soviet aggression, which had been exacerbated by the Berlin blockade. They sought to deter that aggression by working in partnership with America, which protected them through the possession of an atomic bomb. Under article 5, an attack against one was an attack against all, which is why collective defence is situated at the very heart of NATO's founding treaty. NATO, however, is more than just a military organisation. It is also a political organisation that seeks to promote democratic values. It is a vehicle for promoting democracy, individual rights, freedom and the rule of law.

In 2006, NATO members agreed to commit a minimum of 2% of their GDP to spending on defence, to demonstrate political will towards collective defence and to ensure that each member's defence capacity is reflective of NATO's overall military capability. In 2014, members signed up to the defence investment pledge, calling on all members not already meeting the 2% spending guideline to stop their cuts to defence budgets and move to 2% within a decade. Frustratingly, far too few NATO

member states make significant contributions to the hardware of NATO. Six of the G7 which are in NATO do not do that. The United States spends more on defence than the other 28 members put together. Only four NATO allies spend 2% of their economic output on defence, including the United Kingdom. It is incredible that the richest country in Europe, Germany, spends only 1.2% of its GDP on defence. Understandably, Angela Merkel's offer to raise that to 1.5% is seen by Washington as insultingly low. It is reasonable for the US to expect its European partners in NATO to contribute more, which is why successive US Presidents have been losing their patience.

There is a new global reality in security and NATO needs to adapt its capabilities to deal with threats. NATO now recognises that cyber-attacks are possible grounds for invoking article 5, meaning that weak national cyber-defences are a potential invitation to a wider conflict. Member states therefore need to build up their own strength and resilience on this front. It is important that we seek a common minimum standard of hybrid defence spending, as it is so varied across Europe.

NATO, not the EU, has been the foundation of Europe's security. NATO is a source of hope and a safeguard of democracy and freedom. That is why it is vital for the UK to remain a proud contributor to NATO and to take a leadership role to renew NATO to meet the security challenges of today's global reality, so that we can preserve peace and global freedom.

6.43 pm

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): We have had an excellent debate. Eighteen Members have spoken and there have been many constructive interventions. My apologies to the House if I fail to mention all the Members who have spoken. The debate has displayed a wide range of knowledge. Members have spoken with passion and sincerity. I am delighted that Plymouth has been mentioned. The debate has also been largely bipartisan in tone and content. I very much take on board the very good point made by the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who said it was imperative for us all to have as much unity as possible in this important area. There has been a high degree of consensus.

This is an important time for NATO. As we have heard, NATO's origins go back to 1949. We on the Labour Benches are very proud that the likes of Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin in particular played an important role in NATO's formation. Today, the threats which NATO was established in response to are very different, but they are clear threats that we ignore at our peril. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and many other Members accurately referred to Russia's increasingly aggressive activities. We have seen the recent actions of Russia in Ukraine, the illegal annexation of Crimea, and the destabilising cyber-activity of Russia in a number of countries, not least Estonia.

On the weekend before last, it was my pleasure to attend a festival of military music in Cardiff. This was a marvellous display of music, performed with vitality and precision. It also gave me the opportunity to speak to soldiers of the Royal Welsh who served with the Royal Welsh in Estonia. As we have heard from the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State,

[Wayne David]

the number of UK personnel routinely deployed in Estonia is now around 800. Our troops are working alongside French personnel and, before long, Danish personnel. This enhanced forward presence, and tailored forward presence, is vital to ensuring that NATO provides strong defence and a clear deterrence.

Significant as this eastern European theatre is, it is also important to be aware that Russia is becoming increasingly assertive in other areas as well, notably in the Arctic. Members hardly need reminding that we have seen ever-increasing military activity close to the United Kingdom. British fighter pilots, jets and warships have responded to Russian military activity near the UK more than 160 times since 2010 and, only a couple of weeks ago, a Royal Navy destroyer was deployed to escort a Russian underwater reconnaissance ship after it approached the UK coast.

At the end of 2016, along with my Front-Bench colleagues, I visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels. I was impressed by both the collegiate nature of the organisation and its accurate estimation of the growing Russian threat. Not only is Russia increasing the numerical strength of its armed forces, but it is increasing its investment in its capabilities, and it is increasingly prepared to address and test our collective responses. In the light of this, I believe that it is important for our NATO allies to make real their commitment to hit the military spending minimum of 2% of GDP for NATO. That argument has been made coherently and well by the Select Committee on Defence, and we have heard a number of Members in this debate making an eloquent case for it, not least the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) and the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis). It is also important to recognise that the UK only meets its 2% target because the Government include expenditure on things such as pensions. The need for more resources has been stressed strongly by a number of Members on both sides of the House.

At the start of my speech, I stated that this is an important time for NATO, and it is indeed, for the reasons that I and other Members have given. It is also important because we must not give the impression that, because Britain is leaving the EU, we are going to lessen our determination to co-operate with our partners and friends within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In this context, the NATO summit in Brussels in July will be of tremendous importance. There will be important discussions, especially on the creation of a new command structure to deal with maritime security and the threat that is posed in the north Atlantic. A number of Members have made their support known very strongly for these developments.

NATO is a vital alliance. We live in a dangerous and uncertain world, and we need to ensure that NATO speaks with one voice and acts as an effective alliance. All of us in this House agree that NATO is important but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) eloquently said, we must all make sure that we put the case for NATO to the people of this country to make sure that there is not only understanding, but full support.

6.49 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to wind up this debate. I intend to carry on from the very constructive way in which the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) wound up for Her Majesty's Opposition. We have indeed had a constructive, passionate and wide-ranging debate. I am grateful to hon. Members for their ongoing and active engagement with these important issues, especially as we approach the NATO summit in Brussels next month.

I declare an interest. As a reservist of some 30 years, I have vivid memories of my own NATO experience, serving on NATO operations in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. That experience left me with a profound appreciation for the difference the alliance can make in the world. Today, as a Minister, I have been privileged to see how both our civilian and our military personnel, whether at NATO headquarters or deployed on operations, continue to champion the global good. I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to all those who have served NATO with distinction, not just today, but in days gone by. They are the bedrock of our defence.

Hon. Members have made a number of important points today and I will endeavour to deal with them but, if I do not get to everyone, I will write to those concerned. I hope they will understand if I do not take interventions, unless they are absolutely vital, because otherwise I will have no chance of dealing with everyone. The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) started, rightly, by demonstrating the common values we share across the Chamber. I do not intend to break with that by taking a partisan approach to this debate, and I do not doubt for one second her Front-Bench team's commitment to defence—the same commitment we have heard in every speech today—but she will understand why there is concern in the House about some of the historical comments her leader has made, which is why I hope all Labour Members will do their bit to maintain the consensus on how we move forward.

The hon. Lady rightly highlighted the need for interoperability. As she will be aware, this morning the Royal United Services Institute land warfare conference took place, at which I spoke. I was delighted to highlight how 3rd Division, very much the core of our land forces, divisions being the smallest formation at which the full orchestra of war can be used, recently operated on the Warfighter exercise in the United States. Some 1,400 British personnel plugged very effectively into the US 18th Airborne Corps, fighting alongside the US 4th Division, demonstrating how we are completely interoperable, as a tier one nation, with our US allies.

Crucial to that, as we move forward with MDP, is the perhaps less glamorous side to MDP: our ability, and the necessity, to invest in our communications infrastructure, such as Morpheus, an open architecture communications system. Rather than nations buying closed architecture systems, which do not communicate with each other, we have to move forward in this modernised way.

The hon. Lady was also concerned about the future of the DSACEUR. I can reassure her that there is no link to Brexit. We hold that post simply because we, as the UK, are the second-largest contributor to NATO.

I can only repeat the Prime Minister's words at Munich, where she said our support for European security was unconditional.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) highlighted the importance of working with allies, and of course that is very much in the spirit of the NATO summit. Almost every hon. Member across the House highlighted the need for 2% to be a floor, and almost every voice wanted to see that increase. That sends an incredibly powerful message from this Parliament. I will not get drawn into an argument about how we define spending; I can only say that we follow the NATO standards and that we are committed to increasing the defence budget by 0.5% above inflation each year.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) highlighted how we can now add cyber and space to the traditional domains of land, air and sea. Indeed, several hon. Members asked about that challenge. I am pleased to say that NATO has recognised cyber as a domain and agreed that it could be a reason to trigger article 5—article 5 already provides for that—but that is not to say that we should avoid discussing Lord Hague's comments about an article 5B; indeed, it is probably vital that we do discuss them.

Along with the hon. Members for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) and for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), the hon. Gentleman also highlighted the importance of the high north, our appreciation of it and our need to operate in it. In March, I was delighted to be able to join HMS Trenchant on Ice Exercise, and to spend two days underneath the north pole, under the ice. It is a remarkable experience, especially coming back up through the ice. That, I hope, is a clear demonstration of how seriously we take this threat, and we will of course continue to operate up there. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West also mentioned concern about our aerial reconnaissance: that is why we are buying our new P-8 aircraft, which will be located at Lossiemouth.

Nick Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mark Lancaster: No, I will not.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) for what he did as Defence Secretary. It was an honour to serve under him, and he did much to move this agenda forward. He spoke about the opportunity that the summit would bring us, and, in particular—this related very much to the agenda of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe—about the 360° approach that NATO must take. He pointed out that, given the approach of the west Balkan summit, which the UK will host, we must maintain our open-door policy.

I was delighted that the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) mentioned the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, an organisation that is close to my heart. I seem to be inviting the hon. Lady to go to lots of places at the moment, but, as she probably knows, that organisation still exists and operates from Lincoln's Inn, and she should really go and see it, if she would like to. She also spoke of the need, under NATO, to take a comprehensive approach and to work closely with organisations such as the Department for International Development. Intervention in fragile states upstream—the spending of 0.7% of gross national income on aid—can have a great

influence on the prevention of conflict and all the unnecessary issues that it brings, and prevent defence action downstream.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) made a powerful comparison between what is happening now and the advent of air power 100 years ago. At the time the Army did not see the benefit of our air power, apart from, perhaps, a bit of reconnaissance, but, 100 years on, we see that that was a pivotal point. One of my concerns, about which I feel strongly, is that I do not want us to find ourselves, in 10 years' time, looking in our rear-view mirror and wishing that we had seized the opportunity of cyber to a greater extent.

Nick Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mark Lancaster: Oh, all right, I will, but I have only two minutes left.

Nick Smith: I thank the Minister. His right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary told the Defence Committee recently that we would be leaders in cyber. Will he please elaborate on that?

Mark Lancaster: I will. I think that we are leaders in cyber. That was discussed during Defence questions. As was said then, we have invested £1.9 billion in cyber, and in March we opened the new state-of-the-art Defence Cyber School in Shrivenham. I am determined that cyber skills will be a key component for all members of our armed forces.

The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) highlighted concerns about President Trump and his commitment to NATO. I will simply say that I agree with the hon. Members for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), both of whom rightly said that we should judge the United States by its actions and not by its words. I have seen for myself just what the US has been doing in Poland in recent weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) underlined the need for us to continue our security relationship with our European allies post Brexit. The hon. Member for Bridgend and the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) were absolutely right to highlight the need for us to continue to educate people about the value of NATO.

Both my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke about the Baltic states and their concerns about the need for a responsive NATO. Of course, this assumes that the UK is acting in isolation from a standing start, but NATO has graduated response plans to implement once its situational awareness indicators and warnings have identified the need to act. However, they were absolutely right about the concerns in that area, which is why we are at the forefront of pressing NATO to modernise its political, institutional and military capabilities to address the challenges that we face.

Other Members made extremely valuable contributions. I am very conscious of time. If I have the opportunity, I will write to them after the debate. NATO's enhanced forward presence has been on the ground for over a year, with the UK playing a leading role, and if we can build on those successes, sharpening NATO's focus,

[Mark Lancaster]

winning collective commitment for investment in better equipment, bigger budgets and less red tape, and remaining even more united in our resolve in the face of those who seek only to divide us, together, we will ensure the alliance remains what it has been for almost 70 years, not just to our nation but to the west as a whole—a great beacon of hope.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered NATO.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

That the draft Official Statistics Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.—(*Mr Richard Goodwill.*)

PETITION

Charlton Boulevard

7 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I rise to present a petition of residents of south Gloucestershire. It is mirrored by a similar petition with over 500 signatures soon to be presented to South Gloucestershire Council.

The petition of residents of South Gloucestershire,

Declares that local residents have great concern over the proposal to make Charlton Boulevard into a bus only lane, and the resulting effect this will have on local congestion.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage South Gloucestershire Council, and all stakeholders in Charlton Hayes traffic planning to reassess the planned route.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002156]

UK Development Bank

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mr Richard Goodwill.)

7.1 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I start by declaring my interest as chair of the international Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

In this debate I will put forward the strong case for the United Kingdom to establish a development bank. I believe it is needed now more than ever, and for two particular reasons. As we leave the European Union we will also leave the European Investment Bank as a shareholder. That bank is based in London and has provided large sums of very important capital to projects throughout the UK, not least the Thames tideway tunnel not a million miles away from here and being developed right at this moment. I realise that this particular area does not fall within the Minister's responsibilities, but they do cover the context of an international development bank, and both the UK aspect of development, which is at present done through the EIB quite considerably, and the international aspect of development financing can come through the same institution; in fact, that would probably be mutually beneficial.

We are one of the few major countries in the world that does not have its own development bank, whereas France has the Agence Française de Développement, or AFD, the Germans have the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, or KfW, and many other countries also have development banks, often on a very substantial scale. I shall address that point later.

As one of the major challenges the world currently faces, alongside climate change and the environment, is the creation of jobs and livelihoods, particularly for young people, a development bank is needed more than ever. The World Bank estimates that at least 600 million jobs need to be created in the next 10 or so years globally; my estimate is that well over 1 billion new jobs are needed. It is estimated that the population of sub-Saharan Africa will double between now and 2060, to 2.4 billion. If we do not tackle the question of economic development and livelihood-creation around the world and support countries to ensure that their young people have opportunities there, the migration crisis of 2015 onwards will be chicken feed compared with what we will see in future. That is of huge relevance to those young people who are forced to take perilous journeys, and also of great concern to nations in Europe, such as the UK, and elsewhere which will be forced to countenance huge migration on a scale we have not yet seen even in the last few years. This is not a theoretical question of whether it would be nice to have such an institution; it is absolutely fundamental for the development of major public and private projects in the United Kingdom and internationally that we establish a UK development bank, and the sooner the better.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I spoke to him earlier to get an idea of what this was about, and I congratulate him on bringing forward the debate. I have seen too many cases in my constituency of small businesses that are cash poor and asset rich and that are unable to make

payments of even 1p more than the required amount. Does he agree that a development bank such as the one he has outlined that was friendly to small businesses and enterprises would encourage the bigger banks to remember their duty not only to the bottom line but to their local communities, which we represent, and to trust them to do the right thing with their money? Also, if he was looking for somewhere for this investment bank, would he agree that Belfast would be a great place for it?

Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman is right, although I am sure that many places will bid for it when it is established, as I hope it will be.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I work with him on the all-party parliamentary group on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Is he aware that in Scotland, Scottish Enterprise has established the Scottish Investment Bank to provide the kind of domestic support that he describes? Perhaps that could be expanded in a co-operative manner. Will he say a little more about his concept for a global international development bank to tackle global poverty? In particular, will he make it clear that the loans would be for projects and infrastructure, and that there would not be a return to the days of significant loans to Governments, which led to the debt crisis in the 1970s and 1980s? Does he agree that this would involve a different kind of financing?

Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that we do not want a return to the days when countries were burdened with unpayable debts that eventually had to be relieved, at great cost to the countries themselves and to taxpayers around the world. He rightly points out that there are such financial institutions around the United Kingdom. I was not aware of the Scottish Investment Bank, but it is great to hear about it. No doubt that model could be built on.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Before he moves on to the international aspect, does he agree that, in the light of Brexit, this country will need an investment bank? Let us not forget that we trade a great deal, and that trade creates jobs in other countries as well. We will lose regional aid in 2021 as a result of Brexit, and that aid is vital to the midlands in industrial and development terms. He is a midlands MP, and I think he would agree with me on that.

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is why I am saying that the development bank should be for development in the UK and globally—not one or the other, but both. The two are intimately entwined, as he rightly suggests.

We already have a financial institution that deals with investment in developing countries. It is the CDC—formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation—and it does a fine job. The Government have increased its capital, with the support of Parliament, over the past few years, and I welcome that, but that largely involves equity. There are some loans as well, but it largely involves equity and mostly operates in the private sector. A development bank would deal with the public and private sectors, and it would concentrate on long-term loans that would eventually be repaid, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) suggested.

A development bank has three advantages over a grant-making organisation, which the Department for International Development generally is. DFID does a fine job in many areas, but it works largely with grants. Long-term development loans would offer accountability over a long period. When I was a member of the International Development Committee, I sometimes used to ask what DFID had been doing in a particular country 15 or 20 years previously. That was difficult to know, because projects tended to last two, three, five or, at the most, 10 years. There are some fantastic exceptions such as the community forestry project in Nepal, which has been going for decades and has done a great job, but projects tend to be relatively short term. With a long-term loan, development can be tracked, and there is accountability and regular reporting, meaning that we can see year-on-year results for the financing.

Secondly, and obviously, the finance is returnable. It is recyclable. It can be used more than once. In round 18 of the replenishment of the International Development Association, which is the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries, a substantial percentage of the money—well over 35%—was returned funds from previous loans. The IDA was able to raise around \$75 billion in round 18, which runs for three years, and a large percentage of that was money that had come back in repayments. About a third of it was new grants of course, but that shows just how much leverage a development bank has because it uses returned funds. It is not about grants.

Thirdly, a development bank can raise money on the markets through bonds, and I will give the example of the AFD—the French development bank. Members may be interested to know that it was formed in London in 1941 during the darkest days of the second world war. General de Gaulle wanted a bank to promote development, particularly in French overseas territories, but also presumably in France when it was liberated. So a development bank has been founded here, but it was French, and I long to see a UK development bank founded here.

My proposal is to establish a development bank both for the UK and for developing countries. Funding would come from several sources, including the return of our capital in the European Investment Bank and from the international development budget—it would be a legitimate use of that. We are already rightly putting significant sums into the CDC, which is another form of returnable capital. The International Development Committee has considered the matter and recommended it in at least one report over the past few years. I remember being part of the discussions and the general consensus was that a development bank was something that the UK lacked and needed. We have a fantastic organisation for making grants overseas through DFID—it is probably the best in the world—and we have an excellent organisation for equity capital investing in the private sector through CDC, but we lack that middle, which the French, the Germans, the Japanese, the Brazilians and many others have.

Let me tackle one or two of the arguments against a development bank. One argument is that we already subscribe to development banks—such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank—so we do not need one. We do have influence with those banks, but we do not control them and cannot specify where their money goes. Clearly, they could not lend money into the United Kingdom.

[Jeremy Lefroy]

The second is that such banks are not really what the UK does, and the Treasury views them as anathema. Well, that can no longer be said, because the Treasury supported the establishment of the British Business Bank and the Green Investment Bank over the past half-dozen years. Both have been successful, and I believe that the British Business Bank has a portfolio worth at least £9 billion after a relatively short time. The hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned the Scottish Investment Bank, which is based in Glasgow. We already have some examples, but I am talking about something on a larger scale and with a larger remit.

The final argument is about the use of taxpayers' money. I have already said that I am not suggesting that large sums of new taxpayers' money should go into a development bank; I am suggesting that existing streams could be put into such a bank. In respect of our official development assistance budget, it would seem to me an extremely good use of aid to recycle—I use that word again—development aid through a development bank, because it would mean that it could be used more than once. In fact, DFID already does that through various projects, in which it is called returnable capital. I know that the Treasury has wanted to see DFID do more with returnable capital, and this is certainly one way in which it can.

The European Investment Bank will be leaving us—sadly, in my opinion, but it will be—and here is an opportunity for us to replace it, and to replace it with something that would be very beneficial to the United Kingdom economy and to our work globally. We are a world leader in finance, and this gives us an opportunity to show our innovation and expertise in a type of finance of which the United Kingdom perhaps has not done so much in the past few years.

The United Kingdom now has an opportunity, let us seize it. There is a lot of support for this on both sides of the House. Let us take this opportunity, and let us take it quickly.

7.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing this debate and on his thoughtful speech, which was laden with his experience and expertise in this subject. This timely debate allows me to emphasise the importance of the UK's role in international development generally. We have a statutory commitment to development, with a focus on the very poorest people in the world.

Many developing countries have been experiencing rapid economic growth over a sustained period, leading to rising per capita incomes in those countries. That progress has improved millions of people's daily lives, and the UK can feel proud of our ongoing contribution to economic development around the world.

But we cannot simply step away as countries transition to middle-income country status. They still face substantial poverty and inequality challenges, and progress is often precarious. Economic and political shocks have resulted in dramatic reversals, even in relatively prosperous countries. A defining challenge—I recognise my hon. Friend's personal contribution here—is to create mass numbers

of productive and good jobs for the many millions of young people who need real economic opportunities to meet their aspirations, to provide for their families and to take their countries forward.

Sustaining economic progress is important not just for these countries but for whole regions and for global issues that directly affect the UK, as set out in the Department for International Development's economic development strategy, which has a focus on jobs, investment and trade. The type of financing and support these countries want is also evolving. As countries get richer, they are better able to finance their own development. They are able to transition away from grant support for basic service provision and business environment reform and move towards mobilising private sector capital for investment.

Indeed, the economic development strategy, which the Department launched last year, sets out our clear ambition to support countries in transforming their economies and attracting much-needed finance for their private sectors. As my hon. Friend recognises, this House agreed last year to allow the Government to invest more equity into the CDC so it can invest more in companies in Africa and south Asia in key sectors such as infrastructure, financial services and agriculture that create jobs across the economy. Between 2014 and the end of 2016 alone, companies backed by the CDC in those two regions created an estimated 3 million direct and indirect jobs—that is 1 million jobs a year, on average.

These countries also have a continuing need for long-term public sector investment, but many are unable to finance it from domestic resources and have insufficient access to external commercial borrowing on affordable terms, particularly to support infrastructure development at scale so they can readily address the challenges they face meeting the sustainable development goals.

My hon. Friend mentioned, and the House will be aware, that a \$13 billion capital increase for the World Bank Group was agreed in principle earlier this year, of which the UK contribution will be £390 million. As part of that, this Government negotiated and secured a commitment to better pricing from the World Bank Group. Discussions are also likely to start next year about a possible capital increase at the African Development Bank.

Capital increases for multilateral institutions such as those can be counted as ODA, according to the OECD committee's rules. In contrast, capitalising a bilateral sovereign lending institution such as a UK development bank would not be considered ODA. Instead only a proportion of each loan from the bank would be considered ODA, depending on the level of concessionality and the type of country borrowing. The £1 billion UK prosperity fund, which targets middle income countries, is, on the other hand, 100% ODA, because it is grant-funded technical assistance.

So the question in front of us is whether our own approach needs to evolve further to match country needs. That could mean, as countries become better off, a shift away from grant assistance towards other forms of partnership, other financial instruments and helping to leverage other financial flows. Different countries have different needs and we need to consider how best to deploy different instruments in different places.

As I said, this debate is therefore very timely. A UK development bank is one of a range of possible new instruments that could be considered. I noted that hon. Members got in some early lobbying about locations for this still hypothetical and possible new instrument. The Government have a range of instruments available to them to support developing countries. The Secretary of State for International Development has asked officials to explore what new instruments could be developed to meet the changing needs of countries as they get richer and give the UK greater flexibility to respond to individual country needs.

These are complex issues that require careful and detailed consideration, and the work is still at a very early stage. However, in considering all options for potential new instruments, including a development bank, the Government will need to be satisfied on a range of issues. First, such an instrument would have to ensure very clear value for money for taxpayers. Any option involving a new institution would of course involve significant up-front costs, which would need to

be justified by the scale of subsequent benefits. Secondly, we would need to be confident that any option contributes sustainably to development and poverty reduction. For loan instruments that includes ensuring that they do not contribute to unsustainable debt burdens. Thirdly, we would need to ensure that any option is affordable, considering its impact on UK Government finances. Lending options will require provision of a significant non-ODA budget, as well as ODA, which presents a particular challenge. Fourthly, we would need to ensure that any option contributes to the wider UK national interest, in line with the Government's aid strategy.

My hon. Friend has made an important, timely and very well-informed contribution, and I assure him that his advocacy will be taken fully into account as we explore these options further.

Question put and agreed to.

7.23 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 20 June 2018

[DAME CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

9.30 am

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Good morning. I have some technical announcements to make before we start the debate. First, gentlemen may remove their jackets, because the air conditioning in the room is not functioning properly and the temperature may rise. I am sorry, ladies; I cannot really say the same to you! It could get quite warm in here.

We have a few technical failures, in actual fact, I think because there is no one who can put a fuse into the fuse board. We do not have the screen to my right operating, or the screen behind me. We rely entirely on that screen over to my left, although of course my Clerk has a screen here with him. If anyone wants to ask a question about timing or anything else, I shall certainly entertain that.

Without further ado, as the mover of the motion is present, I call Rosie Duffield.

9.31 am

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Government's response to the UN report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Thank you, Dame Cheryl. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship in my first ever Westminster Hall debate.

This is an issue of great national importance and, indeed, embarrassment. What I am raising today is something in dire need of urgent and effective remedy. I am referring to the United Nation's assessment of the UK Government's ability—inability, I should say—to protect the rights of our disabled citizens.

As I am sure most people in the Chamber are aware, last August a UN report by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities found that the UK was in serious breach of international human rights law. The report found that the UK was lacking in enforcing or upholding equality legislation in sectors including education, justice and employment.

The beginning of the report offered some praise for recent Scottish and Welsh legislation, but it went on to make 80 recommendations for further action by the UK Government and the devolved Parliaments to implement. As important as I believe it to be to do so, unfortunately, I shall not have enough time today to consider all 80 UN recommendations in my opening speech, although I hope that colleagues will afford focus to some areas that I shall sadly have to miss.

I shall focus on those aspects of disability and equality rights that are the most repeatedly brought to my attention by my disabled constituents and disability rights groups throughout the country. Those are: poverty, inequality in employment, and substandard, illogical and poorly

enacted access to welfare provision. As such I shall concentrate on articles 27 and 28, and draw some attention to articles 7, 13 and 21.

Let me begin by painting a picture of the situation in the UK. Right now, about 4.2 million disabled people live in poverty across the country. In fact, more than half of those living in poverty are either disabled or living with someone who is. In the UK, half of all disabled people are still unemployed and, even when they do attain employment, not enough provision is in place for them to maintain it sustainably in the long term.

The report on article 27 of the convention made four key recommendations, which have yet to be implemented. The Government have not yet offered an effective employment policy for disabled people.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing her first debate in Westminster Hall, and what an important subject this is. On employment specifically, may I invite her to attend or even join my all-party group on youth employment, which looked at this very subject—those furthest from the labour market—and in particular to look at the report, which drew on organisations such as Leonard Cheshire Disability, highlighting a really important body of work in this area?

Rosie Duffield: I shall do, thank you; that will be interesting.

I suggest that access to legal aid and information on accessing it should be made much more readily available, so that disabled people can challenge employers and potential employers on inadequate access arrangements. According to observations of the report on article 13, regarding rights to justice, the UK must:

“Provide free or affordable legal aid for persons with disabilities in all areas of law”.

I ask the Government: what consideration of the legal aid system has been made to facilitate and enfranchise the legal challenges of disabled people on any of the convention articles or the recommendations in the UN report?

In order to access good legal representation and advice, disabled people also need quality digital information services that take account of customers' disabilities in their design. On article 21 of the convention, the UN committee recommended that the UK improve statutory accessibility standards for all digital information services, including those offered by Her Majesty's Government.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of that commitment is access to information? Since 2010, 478 libraries have closed and we have lost 8,000 librarians, so access to information is yet another blockage to disabled people going into work and gaining their human rights.

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I have heard from my own constituents about the assumption that they have access to a computer, and many people use public libraries for that service.

On top of all of that—as if existing barriers to disabled people maintaining sustainable income and accessing information and help were not already high enough—the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities rapporteur concluded that UK Government

[Rosie Duffield]

cuts have disproportionately impacted on disabled people, amounting to “grave and systematic violations” of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Going back to the point that the hon. Lady made about helping disabled people get into work, my experience in my constituency is that a huge number of projects are going on that do help disabled people to get into work. Clearly, every individual is different, and some people need different levels of support, but will she join me in saying, “Well done,” to the 600,000 disabled people who have moved into work in the past four years? Great progress is being made, and we should congratulate them.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady resumes, may I remind people that we like interventions to be short—slightly shorter than that?

Rosie Duffield: What the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) said sounds fantastic—really good news. However, in my constituency, the lack of jobcentres—they have closed recently—severely impacts on the sort of access that I am talking about. It would be great if that did not happen.

The Centre for Welfare Reform found that austerity has been targeted at disabled people nine times more than the general population, and at severely disabled people 19 times more. Such statistics are shocking. The targeted austerity measures put in place by the Government are clearly unusually cruel in that regard.

The UN recommendations under article 28 state that UK law should ensure that welfare policies protect the income levels of disabled people and their families—the key word there is “protect”. I want to know what the Government think they are doing to protect such income levels and to protect disabled people from having to beg for help from friends, families and food banks in order to stave off poverty, dire need and hunger.

The Government must also ensure that that local authorities have enough funds to support disabled people. Also under article 28, the UN committee’s report is critical of how the squeezing of local authority funding impacts on disabled people. I only need to think of the shocking state of some social housing provision for people in my constituency. For example, one woman who is a full-time wheelchair user—I shall call her Janet—came to my office for help. Janet had been confined to her council flat for months and months. She had been housed on a high floor of a housing block. The flat was not adapted or good enough. My office were pleased to help to secure her move when she needed our help, but for every Janet out there we know about, 10 other people are forced to make do in private with inadequate social housing.

It is important to remember that such inequalities experienced by disabled people in our community are intersectional. The UN committee expressed concern about a lack of legislation in UK law to prevent intersectional discrimination. Intersectional disadvantage means that a person experiences multiple disadvantages from different discriminations at the same time. It is horrifying enough that—according the Disabled Living Foundation—the average income of families with disabled

children is £15,270, or 23.5% below the UK mean income of £19,968, but for a single mother who faces other difficulties such as the gender pay gap or limited child welfare because of cuts, those hardships will be so much worse.

On article 7, the UN committee’s report called on the UK Government to cut the high levels of poverty among families with disabled children. Will the Minister tell me what monitoring there has been in that respect? Does she feel that the Government should be proud of recent statistics relating to family poverty where one or more of the children is disabled? It is not just families who are affected; the onslaught of cuts and austerity unscrupulously enforced by the Conservative Government has left many single disabled adults, and couples in which one or more of the couple is disabled, struggling to obtain and access the bare necessities.

A well-known topic that adversely affects disabled people throughout the UK is the flawed roll-out and poor implementation of the personal independence payments scheme. The many statistics and stories that we regularly hear are simply gut-wrenching. As a result of PIP assessments, 80% of disabled people’s health has deteriorated because of stress or anxiety. A third of those who experience funding cuts as a result of the outcome of the test have struggled to pay for food, rent and basic utilities.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. She talked about cuts, but does she welcome the Government’s increase in the amount of the access to work fund from £42,000 to £57,200? People with disabilities can access that fund to get themselves into work. I led a debate in this Chamber on the Disability Confident scheme, and I invite her to sign up to it, as I am sure other Members have done.

Rosie Duffield: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point, but the cap is still quite low and it is difficult for people to get beyond that.

It sounds too simple to say that problems with PIP assessments cause poverty, but it is true. Those statistics bear witness to that fact. The trauma caused by the PIP assessment process and the ramifications of losing welfare provision are even more infuriating, because 69% of decisions made by PIP assessment bodies are overturned by our courts. I hear about this every single week from my constituents. If 69% of decisions are challenged and later found out to be wrong, the original system is not just broken; it is wholly inadequate.

Vicky Ford: I agree that for some people the PIP assessment has been severely challenging, but only 4% of cases are now being appealed, because the process has improved. [Interruption.] Does the hon. Lady agree that continual improvement is needed, and that we should work to have PIP assessments recorded, when the claimant wishes, so that the claimant can have greater confidence in the process?

Rosie Duffield: I thank the hon. Lady for her point, but as my colleagues are saying, people often give up on the process because it is simply too distressing and stressful. I have not heard any success cases in my surgery. People are really distressed by this.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): In Liverpool, when a constituent tries to appeal one of the rulings of an assessment centre, there is a nine-month wait at Liverpool tribunal services. The case that I raised with the Prime Minister of my constituent Anthony has been resolved individually, but thousands of constituents are affected.

Rosie Duffield: I have heard of similar waiting times, too. It is really distressing and adds to all the trauma that has been going on. I will give an example: Julius Holgate, who is a double leg amputee, won an appeal. The Department for Work and Pensions told him that he was fit to work because he could

“climb stairs with his arms.”

Because he lost his benefits, Julius resorted to selling his belongings in order to survive. The DWP claims that this was a clerical error, but in reality, it was an error caused by a lack of humanity.

Article 28 of the UN recommendations calls on the UK Government to ensure that all eligibility criteria and assessments for PIP, employment and support allowance and universal credit are in line with the social model of disability. When is that being done? Despite the repeated, serious and notorious assessment failures by Atos and Capita—the outsourced companies that conduct the assessment—the Government have renewed their contracts to run the assessment process for two more years. These organisations have repeatedly failed to meet their target of 97% acceptable tests, and 100,000 people have won appeals against their assessments. How much is this flawed system costing the Government? If we ignore the human element just for a second and question how much each reassessment and court challenge costs, surely we can agree that this money would be better spent on rolling out decent provisions for the disabled and on remedying those affronts to human rights by introducing a holistic, bespoke assessment service that includes a home visit.

The PIP assessment system is highly traumatic and often misassesses; in January of this year, it was ruled by our own courts to be severely in need of remedy and review. In January this year, the High Court ruled that the PIP system is “blatantly discriminatory” against people with mental health conditions. That criticism is echoed by many mental health and disability organisations. I am sure we all appreciate that not all wounds and maladies are necessarily physical and observable. A single-day assessment is therefore a ludicrous way of properly gauging whether a person is in need of financial assistance because of mental health conditions.

It is high time that this Government turned their focus away from tax breaks for bankers towards a system of disability welfare that is, at the very least, in line with basic human rights outlined by the UN. The convention needs to become part of UK law. The UN committee noted last year that there had not been a full review of the UK’s laws and policies in the light of the convention. There is not enough information on what the UK is doing to stop disabled people being negatively affected as the UK leaves the EU. A statement by Inclusion London explains:

“Disabled People’s organisations are seriously disappointed by the Government response and its failure to adequately take on board any of the UN inquiry recommendations. This response brings into question the Government’s commitment to the progressive realisation of Disabled people’s rights.”

Michael Tomlinson: The hon. Lady is being generous with her time. She has used phrases such as “targeted austerity” and “lack of humanity”, but will she not join me in welcoming the fact that disability benefits spending is at its highest level ever, and that it will continue to be higher than it was in 2010 every year up to 2022?

Rosie Duffield: We all know that in real terms that is not the case, because the cost of living is constantly rising. I do not hear from my constituents who struggle to pay the bills that their lives are any easier—in fact, the opposite is true. We have to disagree on that one.

Since the committee’s investigation in October 2015, further measures have been introduced that have or will have further adverse impacts on disabled people. They include the cut to ESA for those in the work-related activity group that is due to come into force in April 2017 and further cuts to local authorities’ social care budgets.

I call on the Government to develop and implement a plan of action that abolishes any laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against disabled people. Imagine losing your livelihood as a result of a flawed assessment that is not your fault. Imagine going hungry, living in poverty and being under so much stress that it severely affects your wellbeing. Most of us in this room will never have to experience that, but most of us are not already living with the challenges of disability.

I call on this Government to begin taking seriously the poverty and discrimination experiences of disabled people and those who care for loved ones with disability. I call on this Government, as a bare minimum, to honour their commitment to human rights, by accepting and acting on the recommendations provided by the UN inquiry. The protection of human rights is a sacred function of the state and we are in breach of that function. It is not the time to deny facts, ignore inequality and dismiss the well-documented experiences of our citizens. It is time to act. I urge the Minister to do just that.

I thank hon. Members for listening. I am sure many colleagues wish to speak because, as I said at the beginning, there are so many recommendations that we could cover in this debate. Each recommendation and article is important and each is deserving of its own debate.

9.48 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing an important debate.

The hon. Lady mentioned the problems created by the closure of jobcentres. There are other similar cases. For example, my own constituency has no jobcentre at all—the jobcentres are in neighbouring Oxford, Abingdon or Reading—but rather than moan about that and point out the difficulties that that creates, I have been working with the Secretary of State to try to put in place a solution to overcome it. That solution is a system of mobile jobcentres, the model for which is the way the Post Office runs its mobile post offices around the country. I envisage a situation where, in areas where a jobcentre has closed or there is no jobcentre, jobcentre vans turn up on certain days—they would have to be

[John Howell]

regular days—to provide the services and advice that many people want. I am happy to recommend that model to hon. Members—as I said, I am already working with the Secretary of State to try to get it ready.

My second point is about PIP. In a number of cases—I say this quite openly—PIP has been delivered appallingly slowly. Again, I have been working with the Secretary of State to look at how those payments can be sped up and at how information can be better integrated into how PIP is delivered, so that we do not continually knock the system but try our best to improve it.

My motivation for speaking in the debate was to highlight the excellent work done in my constituency by the Ways and Means Trust and its Greenshoots nursery, which provides excellent help to people with a whole range of disabilities, including mental disabilities, on how to do work. It provides lectures in various areas to try to give people a basic intellectual grasp of what they need to do, and it provides people with the physical work experience to be able to take that forward. I am sure that everyone looks forward to Christmas, for a range of reasons, but I look forward to it in particular because it means I can go to Greenshoots to get the wreath for my front door—they are made there in a particularly spectacular way.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution to this important debate. Does he agree that we have moved on since the UN report, which the Government refuted? Does he also agree that it is good that through the Disability Confident scheme 600,000 disabled people have secured employment and the dignity it brings? That must surely be a good thing—and that has happened in the past four years.

John Howell: My hon. Friend is quite right—it is very important to mention that. I will say something about the Disability Confident scheme in a moment.

Let me finish what I was saying about the Greenshoots nursery, because it is important. My hon. Friend highlighted the importance of dignity in employment. That is important for people who might otherwise be disadvantaged from taking employment. From what I have seen, Greenshoots delivers a tremendous boost to people's confidence, wellbeing and ability to provide for themselves.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Prior to coming to this place, I was the main development worker for Social Firms England, which supported enterprising charities, such as the one the hon. Gentleman describes, to support disabled people into work. Social Firms England was decimated by cuts. Social Firms Scotland and Social Firms Wales were active and well supported, but I was the only worker for Social Firms England, and I worked one day a week. That was it—that was all the support it had. Social firms are going to the wall. That is what is happening to disability support. Remploi was also cut. Support for getting disabled people into work has actually been decimated in the past eight years—it has not moved forward.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that interventions really must be short. I have been very generous, but I will not remind you all again.

John Howell: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not accept that there has been that level of cuts to charities in my constituency, or that cuts are having such an appalling effect on people with disabilities, who are continuing their work.

A wide range of companies and organisations are involved in providing these services. We have the likes of Microsoft and Glaxo, we have slightly smaller companies that are nevertheless household names, such as Sainsbury's, and we have a range of individual organisations, such as the Greenshoots nursery, Leonard Cheshire and indeed Mencap, which provide assistance to people with disabilities in my constituency.

To pick up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), more than 6,500 employers are involved in the Disability Confident scheme, and that is to be celebrated. I am pleased to say that all main Government Departments have now achieved Disability Confident leader status, which is to be welcomed.

Luke Graham: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the number of disabled people in work. It is important that we give our constituents the facts. Opposition Members have used very emotive language. I know from having a family member who has been disabled and from the number of cases that my office works through how disruptive PIP assessments can be. We need to cut through to get to the facts and look at turning the screw on Atos and the other companies that deliver these services. It is not a genuine intention of the Government to be inhumane, but there has been a failure of administration by some of the companies that we have employed to deliver services.

John Howell: I am sorry, Dame Cheryl, for allowing interventions to run on, but my hon. Friend makes an important point. He is right that we need to cut through the haze and give the figures, so let me repeat one: 600,000 disabled people have been moved back into work in the past four years. That is something that we should be proud of and hang on to.

Like my hon. Friend, the problems that I have found have been with the implementation of PIP, not with PIP itself. It behoves us to work closely with the Department and the Secretary of State to ensure that we get those things right, and I am pleased that I have been able to do that.

Vicky Ford: Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Howell: Of course—provided my hon. Friend is brief.

Vicky Ford: This time last year I got a lot of cases from constituents who had problems with the PIP assessment process, but it appears to have improved. I fundamentally believe that it would be better if it were easier to get those assessments recorded. Does my hon. Friend agree that that would put more trust in the system?

John Howell: I do—my hon. Friend has got this right. We can all help with that. I will not claim responsibility for the improvement in PIP, but I think that all of us who have worked with the Department and the Secretary

of State to do that can claim some responsibility for the improvement in the process. We need to do more to make that work.

With those remarks, Dame Cheryl, I will sit down and allow the debate to move on before anyone else intervenes at length.

9.59 am

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I apologise in advance, because I have some parliamentary business to attend to, so I may not be able to stay for the winding-up speeches.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for introducing such an important debate. The points that have been made have been both interesting and troubling. I say that because, while I understand the facts and figures presented, the reality experienced in my constituency is very different. I will tell some of the stories that constituents of mine have shared with me, giving first names but not surnames.

I was approached by a constituent called Hugh, who has T-cell psoriasis in his hands and feet. He struggles to dress himself without great discomfort, and when I met him he could not lift a cup of coffee with both hands. Walking can be difficult for him. He was found to be fit for work.

Gloria is 71 years old, with arthritis in her legs. She lives on the second floor of a building with no lift and struggles with stairs. She lives with a grown-up son who has learning difficulties—although he has a job. With regard to her housing, she was told that she cannot be moved to any higher band as her son works, so they consider him to live independently.

Victoria has severe mobility issues and sepsis in her legs. At her first assessment, the disability element was reduced as she could prepare her own meals and wash herself with installations at home. Her condition has since got worse, but she was refused PIP and the PIP assessment at home. She was granted an assessment only when my office intervened.

Harry was working in the Navy. He sustained a brain injury so is not able to work. He suffers from severe depression and anxiety as well as the brain injury. The PIP assessor said in his assessment that he was “too aggressive” and ignorant of his mental health conditions. PIP was declined as a result. Those are just a few of the people I come across, so warm words or advising about more money that can be accessed is not helpful at all.

I was tearful when I spoke with this last person. She explained that she had had four strokes—four strokes. She was expected to do a work capability assessment, and because she touched her face during the assessment, the assessors said she was able to work; in fact, they did not believe that she was as paralysed as had been said. That is what we come across as Members of Parliament.

We are not standing here to say that this is unfair just to represent the Opposition and be against what the Government have set out, but the fact remains that it is unfair. The disabled people I represent believe they are “the forgotten class”. Where are they when we look at assessments? I agree with the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) that assessments should be recorded, because the way in which assessors put questions across is bad.

For example, assessors say, “Can you walk 50 metres?” but how far is that? We do not look at that. Another of my constituents, who has Asperger’s, was told, “You can walk 50 metres, can’t you?” so he said, “Yes,” not understanding the impact that would have.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury said, the four recommendations on article 27 have not been taken on board. We talk about facts, but how many of the recommendations have been implemented? How many people have to go under the radar, unnoticed and unhelpt, and fight, going for appeals with no deadline or timeframe for how long they will wait for their appeal to be heard? They are supposed just to get on with life.

It is not enough to say, “We are trying to encourage disabled people into work.” That is applaudable and honourable, and I agree with that when they can work, but many disabled people cannot work and are not only penalised for sometimes having a physical disability that prohibits them from working; but we say, “We know you need financial assistance—this welfare—but we’re not going to give it to you until you can prove to us how disabled you are.” Something is wrong there.

Michael Tomlinson: The hon. Lady is making a passionate and cogent speech. Does she accept that the vast majority of disabled people do want to move into work? While welcoming the 600,000 who have already done so, does she agree that that is just a start and that we should look to close the disability employment gap in its entirety?

Fiona Onasanya: Let me be clear. It is good that disabled people want to get into work, and this is a start. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. Where we differ is on disabled people who are not able to work who have to fight to prove that. I do not agree with that. It is not correct; it is against their human rights.

I am not saying that those who can work should not work but that we should listen to what those who cannot work are saying. They are going through assessments. I have a constituent who had four strokes and is physically disabled, yet because she touched her face she is told she can work. Something is wrong there. Something is wrong with a double amputee being told they can climb the stairs with their hands. That is what needs to be addressed.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly passionate speech with which I am completely in agreement. The assessments really need reviewing. My constituent wanted a home visit because he struggles even to leave his house. On the first appointment, he fell outside his door, so he could not get there. For the second appointment, which the assessors agreed to give, he struggled to get the buses—transport was slow and delayed—but he got there. They refused to see him because he was three minutes late. He did not get his assessment. The system urgently needs changing.

Fiona Onasanya: I agree that the system needs changing. My concern is that if there are recommendations that could make a process better or even more streamlined, why would they not be adopted? I do not have the details of the situation of my hon. Friend’s constituents, but I do not understand why his assessment would be refused for being three minutes late.

[Fiona Onasanya]

We are all in agreement on seeking to help those who need assistance, but why are recommendations that would make the process easier and more streamlined not being taken on board? Why are we not looking at people's rights? We are all one race—the human race—so why are we not looking at people and saying, “You need assistance.”? It is a bit like a body: if in a big society—to coin a phrase from the Government—something is not functioning correctly, why do we not stop and rectify it? Why do we just say, “Actually, don't worry about that,” and carry on? That is how it comes across to our constituents.

Vicky Ford: Has the hon. Lady ever taken part in a work capability assessment? I had one acted out for me to allow me to understand the process, which was enormously helpful. I would recommend that other Members do that. One can either sit through an assessment or have the process demonstrated. It was really helpful to aid one's understanding.

Fiona Onasanya: Sorry, Dame Cheryl, I realise that time is short, so I will be quick. I have not been to a work capability assessment, but one of the people I work with who was a barrister goes to many assessments to advocate on behalf of disabled people, because the assessments are not very clear and the way in which questions are asked can be quite misleading. That is how I was able to give the analogy about the distance in metres.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a good speech with many good points. I believe the Government have been listening, and the Minister is very much aware of some of the shortcomings in the assessment process and has worked incredibly hard to try to rectify them. Is she willing to acknowledge that the Government have listened to the concern of Members across the House and improvements are being made to the process?

Fiona Onasanya: No, I do not agree. The Government are hearing, but they are absolutely not listening. If they were listening, they would implement the recommendations.

10.10 am

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Gillan, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on her excellent speech.

I will be brief because several Members still wish to speak. This debate is about the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and the UN committee that investigated the UK regarding breaches of those rights. This started back in 2015, when I was the shadow Minister with responsibility for disabled people. I was interviewed by the committee, and its first report stated that there were “grave and systematic violations” of the convention. The findings published in 2016 charged the UK Government with failing to uphold the rights with which we as a signatory to the convention from 2009 had agreed to comply. The judgment was based on facts,

testimony and evidence. We have been saying that we should judge things on the facts, and this judgment did just that. The Government must accept responsibility for the devastating impact of their austerity policies, which have had the biggest impact on disabled people.

For eight years, we have seen cuts to social security support—that has already been mentioned—but the convention's judgment goes far beyond that. There have been cuts affecting disabled people who need social care and cuts to specific support for disabled people in the NHS. There have been cuts to support for those with special educational needs and disability in schools and to allowances for disabled students. The list goes on and on. We have recently debated trains, but there have been cuts to the Access for All programme that seeks to improve accessibility to train stations. There have been cuts to supported housing, legal aid and much, much more. What disabled people are going through is absolutely horrendous.

I would like to focus on a few points from the UN report. In August 2017, the UN committee met to consider whether any progress had been made since the devastating report of 2016, and unfortunately it said, “No, there is no progress. You are not a global leader on disability rights.” In the recent debate on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, there has been a fundamental disagreement about upholding rights, because of the failure to support the charter of fundamental rights that gives more protections under domestic law to disabled people.

Bill Grant: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Debbie Abrahams: I am sorry, but I will not give way because my colleagues still wish to speak.

The UN committee stated that cuts to social protection in the UK were “a human catastrophe”—a catastrophe! The UK's human rights watchdog stated that the examination by the UN had seen a “disconnect” between the UK Government's replies and the “lived experiences” of disabled people. That is what we are hearing, despite Government Members saying that everything is hunky-dory. In conclusion, the rapporteur stated that the committee was

“deeply concerned about the lack of recognition of the findings and recommendations of the conducted inquiry”.

The Government have said that they will not act on that report, but it is not the only such report. Indeed, the Council of Europe has also stated that it has significant concerns regarding upholding the rights of disabled people.

The Minister has said that the Government will set up a new inter-ministerial group to co-ordinate work across the Government and seek to reinvigorate our engagement with disability stakeholders to help shape our plans. Will she confirm what that engagement will involve, including which deaf and disabled people's organisations will be engaged, as repeatedly recommended by the UN? Will she publish details of the membership and terms of reference for that group and say whether it will extend to the Department of Health and Social Care? There are real concerns that the consultation on the Green Paper on adult social care, which includes support for disabled people, is failing to engage with DDPOs.

The response to a question that I asked in the debate on social care on 25 April shows a complete lack of understanding about article 19 of the convention and what is meant by independent living. Last year, the UN disability committee brought out a general comment on article 19, in which it referred to how institutionalisation can occur in people's own homes. People can become isolated and separated from society if they are not given that basic support, and we are effectively seeing the re-institutionalisation of disabled people due to current cuts to social care. Waiting until autumn to see the Green Paper on adult social care, as has been suggested, is not good enough. Some £7 billion has been cut from social care, and 1.2 million people, including disabled people, are not getting the support they need. To their shame, the Government's failure to recognise and act on the social care crisis is affecting our most vulnerable citizens.

Finally, will the Government consider producing a cumulative impact assessment of all their policies on disabled people and their impact since 2010, as recommended by many organisations? It is time for a different approach, and that is summarised in the manifesto that we developed with and for disabled people: "Nothing about you, without you." I know my hon. Friends are building on that commitment, which includes scrapping current disability assessments and replacing them with an holistic, person-centred approach that is based on the principles of dignity and inclusion. We have already committed to incorporating the UN CRPD fully into UK law—something that was rejected by this Government. We believe that, like the NHS, our social security system is there for every one of us. Nine out of 10 disabled people have become disabled—their disability has been acquired. We should recognise that that could happen to anyone and ensure that the support is there. It is time for things to change, and I hope the Minister will reassure us that that will happen.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I would like to start the winding-up speeches at 10.30 am, so if hon. Members can bear that in mind I would be absolutely delighted.

10.17 am

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on her excellent speech.

I wish to focus on the effect of universal credit on disabled people, and others. As we know, the National Audit Office has released a report ahead of the roll-out of universal credit, stating that the new benefits cost more to administer than the previous system of the six benefits it replaced, which include jobseeker's allowance, tax credits, housing benefit, personal independence payment, and employment and support allowance. The spending watchdog also said that it was uncertain whether universal credit would ever deliver value for money. The report proves that the assertion by the Department for Work and Pensions that everything is going well is false, as many of my constituents in Hartlepool can testify.

Hartlepool was one of the early implementers of universal credit. My office is informed about issues with universal credit on a daily basis, and many people in the

town have become accustomed to that unjust and arbitrary system. Some have not just experienced hardship, but suffered near destitution through delayed payments or through sanctions that affect all six benefits, not just one, which mean that they experience a drop in the level of benefit that they receive compared with the income derived from previous benefits.

Hon. Members will be aware of the recent High Court judgment on the roll-out of the new payment system. Two severely disabled men, one of whom is a constituent of mine, experienced unlawful discrimination when their benefits were significantly reduced after moving from one area to another, and subsequently on to universal credit. My constituent, who can be identified only by the initials AR, is 36 years old and moved from Middlesbrough to Hartlepool in 2017. AR has severe mental health problems and was forced to move because he could no longer afford the property where he was living, because of the bedroom tax. Unfortunately for him, he moved to an area where universal credit was already being rolled out and was therefore required to make a claim under the new scheme. Both my constituent and the other complainant were advised by DWP staff that their benefit entitlement would not change. However, they experienced a monthly drop of £178 under universal credit. Following the judgment, their solicitor Tessa Gregory from Leigh Day said:

"Nothing about either of the claimants' disability or care needs changed. They were simply unfortunate enough to need to move local authorities into a universal credit full service area. The Government need to halt the roll out and completely overhaul the system to meet people's needs, not condemn them to destitution. If this doesn't happen, further legal challenges will inevitably follow."

Universal credit has taken significantly longer than intended to roll out and it may cost more—as determined by the NAO—than the benefits system it replaces. Also, the DWP will never be able to measure properly whether it has achieved its stated goal of increasing employment. On the contrary, thanks partly to the fact that universal credit covers a broader span of claimants who are required to look for work—such as the disabled—than jobseeker's allowance does, the count of the number of unemployed people in "full service" areas has been inflated. Because of that, my constituency currently holds the unenviable record of having the highest rate of unemployment in the country. The total number of unemployed claimants there in May 2018 was 4,080, which is 9.6% of the economically active population of the town. The UK average is 2.8%. I am confident that when universal credit is rolled out across other constituencies, we will lose that unwanted title, particularly as I am proud to say that our figures for youth unemployment are among the best in the UK.

The NAO report concludes that the DWP has not shown significant sensitivity towards some claimants, and it does not know how many claimants are having problems with the programme or whether they have suffered hardship, as in the case of AR. In 2017, about a quarter of new claims were not paid in full or on time. Late payments were delayed on average by four weeks between January and October of that year, with 40% of those affected waiting for 11 weeks or more, and 20% waiting for about five months. Never mind the able-bodied—just imagine the effect on disabled people. The report is talking about my constituents and a system

[Mike Hill]

that renders people homeless, destitute and desperate. It is simply unacceptable—chaotic and catastrophic. I pity those in other areas who are about to feel its full force.

10.21 am

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing such an important debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) hit the nail on the head in her speech: the report is a condemnation of the Government. It cannot be emphasised enough just how damning the 2016 UN report is. Conservative Members can talk all they want, with weasel words, about the system getting better, but we know that that is not the case—certainly not in constituencies such as mine in north Liverpool, which is one of the most deprived in the country. I want to tell the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) that we have had our two jobcentres closed. The council has worked so hard—tirelessly—to develop co-location plans and put any proposal in front of the Government to save those jobcentres, to absolutely no avail. I wish him better in Henley, but it certainly has not worked in north Liverpool.

The chairwoman of the UN's Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities described the Government's treatment of sick and disabled people as a "human catastrophe". That is not poetry or a rhetorical flourish; that language is used deliberately and precisely, based on the weight of evidence behind the report. That report came to the conclusion that the Government's welfare cuts have resulted in "grave and systematic violations" of the human rights of disabled people. It is a national scandal, and one that I see in my surgeries every single week. I am going to talk about a few cases that I have had to deal with in recent months. The situation should be a wake-up call to the Government, but they learn no lessons. My constituency casework is loaded with complaints relating to personal independence payments. Instead of supporting people, the process is dehumanising and inaccurate, and it exacerbates the health conditions that my constituents suffer from.

It is no surprise that there is widespread distrust of the assessment, when 68% of PIP decisions that are taken to tribunals are overturned. As I said earlier, that means a nine-month wait to get the right decision and, often, to get the original decision overturned. In that time people lose their mobility vehicles—at what cost to Government, when they must return them? Something that I have seen happen in the system—and I wonder whether it is systematic—is people going from a low rate of care with high mobility to a high rate of care with low mobility. That seems to happen in case after case, because if someone's care rate goes up they get a couple of quid extra a week, but if they lose their high-rate mobility they lose their car and their ability to leave the house—they lose their ability to exist.

At Prime Minister's questions on 25 April, at column 879, I challenged the Prime Minister on a specific case—that of Anthony, who has a chronic, debilitating illness. After his PIP assessment he had a nine-month wait. Once that was raised in Parliament, the DWP intervened

to overturn the decision. However, I see that every week—the Prime Minister is asked about this issue, and it is always an individual case. Well, it is not an individual case—it is built into the system. I should like to know what work the Minister is doing with the Ministry of Justice about tribunal waits. Is she working on that? There must be investment in the court system if the problem is to be resolved. I do not see any work being done on it at all.

The Government's contractors, Atos, Capita and Maximus, have consistently failed to meet basic performance standards. One of my constituents was asked by an assessor about her cerebral palsy—a lifelong condition from birth. She was asked how long she had had it and whether it would get better. What on earth is going on, and what do the Government do when such cases are brought to light? Several other people have told me that the information in their assessment report was inaccurate and did not reflect what was said in the assessment, but for some of my constituents even getting that far is a challenge. My office has been inundated with reports of the unsuitability of assessment centres for disabled people. The range of problems includes a lack of suitable parking, no drop-kerb for wheelchairs and no disabled access button to open doors. A report released this month by Muscular Dystrophy UK found that two in five respondents had been sent to an assessment centre that was not accessible for disabled people. You could not make this stuff up. It is not a matter of individual cases, one by one. There is a systemic problem at the heart of the Government's policy, and until they wake up to that fact nothing will improve.

Bill Grant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dan Carden: I will not.

The pointless reassessments of people with severe, long-term or progressive conditions are cruel, and an absurd waste of resources. I have a constituent with Down's syndrome whose payments stopped after she was transferred to PIP, as did those of another constituent, who has multiple sclerosis. I welcome the announcement this week that the Government are preparing to end such unnecessary reviews of people with severe or progressive conditions, but that should not have taken the determined effort of disability campaigners. The Government need to understand that what they are doing is already debilitating for the people in question. Having to be part of national and local campaigns just to get basic human dignity in the assessment process is outrageous.

In any case, it is simply not enough to tinker around the edges. The truth is that all the problems are not glitches in the system. They are the system itself. Research published this month by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that almost 650,000 people with physical or mental health problems were destitute in the UK last year. That means being so poor that they cannot afford essentials such as heating, regular meals or basic toiletries. The systematic impoverishment and denial of basic rights highlighted in the UN report and others are part of what we now know to be a "hostile environment", not just in one or two Departments but across the board. If a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable, what does that say about ours?

We must treat disabled people, and the vulnerable or dispossessed, with dignity, and it is absurd to think that we can do that when we have a programme of austerity and cuts in local authorities and across the board. That is what the report signals. Not only does the Government's austerity agenda harm communities and society; it hits the most vulnerable and the poorest hardest.

10.29 am

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, particularly given all the excellent work you have done over the years for people with autism and on the all-party parliamentary group. I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who made an excellent, detailed and thorough speech. The empathy she feels for her constituents and the hard work she will do in the constituency on their behalf were clear. I particularly thank her for bringing this important debate to be heard today.

I thank all the hon. Members who contributed by reminding us that some progress is being made, particularly in employment and with the Disability Confident scheme, and that further employers are signing up. It is important that we make progress with that scheme, but I would caution that I am aware that an employer can sign up and, I believe, reach the full level without employing anyone with a disability. Further progress is required in that regard.

I also thank all hon. Members who contributed for outlining the widespread failings in the system, giving constituency case examples to show the impact on the people they are trying to help, and highlighting where the issues lie—not simply to berate the Government, but to suggest areas where we need to work collectively to take things forward. We must work collectively to improve the lives of people with disability across the United Kingdom, to ensure that they reach their full potential.

We are all aware that the reason we are here is that the optional protocol allowed the United Nations committee to investigate a state party if it received “reliable information” of “grave or systematic violations” of the convention. The UK is the first country to be investigated by the UN under this convention. I believe that brings great shame, but it is also a warning and a call to improve where we are. We must grasp that and stridently take it forward. The report published on 6 October 2016 found that reforms have led to grave and systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, emphasising in particular changes to housing benefit entitlement, eligibility for PIP and social care, and the ending of the independent living fund.

I am aware that the Government have challenged the veracity of the report, but it must be said that it was based on thorough research, with visits across all four nations of the United Kingdom, interviews with more than 200 people and the collection of more than 3,000 pieces of documentary evidence. Where facts were disputed, they were cross-checked with collateral sources, including national statistics and parliamentary inquiry reports. Although hon. Members may wish to challenge the report, it is thorough and detailed. While the Government have not conducted the cumulative impact assessment on disabled people to challenge the report, we have to

take it and its findings and view them very seriously, and ensure that the system is overhauled in a positive way that changes the lives of people with disability.

The subject of welfare benefits has been thoroughly covered today, so I will just touch briefly on it. The Access to Work fund is a good scheme, but it requires much further publication to increase awareness. Many people in my constituency and beyond, whom I have spoken to through the all-party parliamentary group for disability, were not aware of it. Where a scheme has the potential to assist people, we should ensure that they can access it.

Debbie Abrahams: The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech and her point about Access to Work is absolutely right. Of the 4 million disabled people who want and are able to work, 25,000 have had support through Access to Work on a yearly basis. It is just not adequate.

Dr Cameron: Perhaps, where things are assisting, we need to look at rolling them out and generalising them to ensure that those who need that system can access it. It is an irony indeed that people cannot access Access to Work.

I will speak briefly on the need for medical collateral information to be accepted and routinely sought in welfare assessments. I feel that often those assessments are conducted in a way that perhaps does not lend itself to getting the adequate information. People may not be aware that they can bring that information, or they may not understand the system properly, but it is crucial. Often people who come to be assessed are anxious and stressed; they may not be able to explain in the best way the extent of their difficulties, but having that collateral information can be valuable in ensuring that an accurate assessment is undertaken in the first place and the individual does not have to go through the stress of appeals processes, which have such a devastating impact.

The Scottish Government intend to place dignity and respect at the heart of the welfare system. That is obviously in transition, but it is a great aspiration and something that we should aspire to across the four nations. I ask the Minister to look at the “Ahead of the ARC” inquiry that the all-party parliamentary group for disability completed last year. It points out a number of important areas, including access to training in job sectors, particularly those that will be sectors of the future and where jobs are likely to be found. The Government have made some movements on apprenticeships, and I am grateful for that, but I think much more can be done.

Public procurement should reward businesses that provide inclusive employment opportunities, to ensure that procurement contracts are not just awarded on cost, but look at equality legislation and inclusion wherever possible. We also need to be mindful that when we think of people with disabilities, the stereotype is often that they are unemployed or work for someone else; we need to also think about maximising skills and potential and looking at further opportunities for entrepreneurs who have disabilities. That could offer a flexible work pattern, which might suit many people, but it would also harness the skills and abilities of many people who perhaps are not already in the workplace, and who wish to take that forward, employ other people and contribute greatly to our economy. Let us try to change the rhetoric.

[Dr Cameron]

In the minute I have left, I make a plea to the Minister on Motability. People are losing their Motability cars; is there any opportunity for people to retain their cars during the appeal process rather than losing them? I recently had a constituent who had won their appeal, but had already taken out a loan for a car, and was left with a Motability car and a massive loan at the end of the process. Surely that is not something that should be happening when the process was faulty in the first place.

Tracy Brabin: The announcement of £20 million for the Jo Cox loneliness fund is very welcome, but is it not counter-intuitive that on the one hand the Government are offering this sort of money to combat loneliness while on the other hand they are taking away mobility cars?

Dr Cameron: Yes, we must ensure inclusion and that people can be independent and live as independently as possible.

The final point I will make before sitting down is that with the closure of banks right across the United Kingdom, many people feel vulnerable going to mobile banks. When I spoke to the Royal Bank of Scotland, I was told that it does not even have ramps for its vans, so the mobile vans are not accessible. Is that something the Minister could have a dialogue about, with RBS in particular and with other banks? People with disabilities have told me they feel vulnerable getting money from a mobile van in an open setting, even when they can access it, and they are fearful that it may place them at risk. Those are some of the practical issues we need to take forward to improve people's lives.

10.39 am

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), first for securing this important debate and secondly for the incredibly powerful speech she gave. She was right to highlight that no Government should introduce legislation that discriminates against disabled people. She rightly stated that the Government's record is a national shame, and highlighted the dire inequalities in social security and access to justice, the increase in poverty, and the lack of access to information. There are huge difficulties in access to digital information, as my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) highlighted, and alternative formats for people living with sight loss are lacking. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury was right to call out the fact that there is a lack of legislation covering intersectional discrimination.

I also want to pay tribute to some of my other colleagues, including my hon. Friends the Members for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) and for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden). My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) made a powerful speech. She has led the way and has held the Government to account powerfully for many years. I thank her for all the work she has done and will continue to do. She rightly highlighted that the Government chose not to include the charter of fundamental rights in the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which is a shame. My hon.

Friend the Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) shared the powerful testimonies of some of her constituents. I thank everybody for all their efforts. It is right to point out that this is a shame, and there is no other way of looking at it.

The UK was once at the forefront of disability rights: 48 years ago, we passed the groundbreaking Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. It was led by Lord Alf Morris, who shortly afterwards became the first Minister for Disabled People—I am honoured to be in that shadow role today. That legislation was a response to disability campaigners calling attention to the deep and pervasive injustices that disabled people face. In December 2007, we became signatories to the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, which committed us to progressively realising the rights of disabled people—our rights to live independently, to be included in the community and to have access to education and justice. After eight years of brutal Tory cuts to disabled people's social security, of increasingly cruel and degrading assessments and sanctions, and of being stigmatised by Government Ministers, disabled people know that the Government have not been defending our rights. The UN CRPD committee found that disabled people's rights have been "gravely and systematically violated". It is difficult to overstate the significance of that judgment.

The UK was not merely the first country to be found in breach of the convention's obligations; we were the first ever to be investigated. Over the past eight years, we have seen not the progressive implementation of disabled people's rights, but their unprecedented erosion and violation. The committee found that Departments are grossly failing disabled people.

The brutal cuts to disabled people's social security have made a mockery of article 19, on the right to live independently and in the community, and article 28, on the right to an adequate standard of living. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 alone cut £28 billion from social security. Half of people in poverty are now either disabled or living with someone who is disabled. Almost a quarter of disabled people are now forced to miss meals because of economic hardship, and one in five cannot pay to heat their homes. Such drastic cuts to social security led the UN committee to find that disabled people were the single biggest group affected by Tory austerity policies.

The UN said that the systematic impoverishment of disabled people was an entirely predictable effect of the Government's austerity policies. It was, of course, predicted by disability groups, but the Government ignored it and refused to carry out a full cumulative impact assessment of the cuts.

Dan Carden: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disappointing and outrageous that the Government have wasted more than £100 million on pointless appeals and on putting disabled people through a nightmare as they try to access the benefits they deserve?

Marsha De Cordova: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Will the Government commit to carry out a cumulative assessment of their tax and social security reforms since 2010? In addition to the devastating cuts and suspicion, disabled people have been endlessly mistreated by the chaotic Department for Work and Pensions. High Court

judgments have repeatedly found that the DWP has blatantly discriminated against disabled people. Only last week, it was found that the cutting of disability premiums from universal credit was “unlawfully discriminatory”. There has been “blatant discrimination” against PIP claimants, and employment and support allowance has been continuously underpaid.

The UN report found that disabled people are being undermined not just by the social security failings, but by the lack of social care funding. Since 2009, the number of disabled people receiving social care has fallen by nearly 30%. The UN report highlights that social care is vital, and that it allows many disabled people to live independently. Will the Minister outline whether the Government’s forthcoming Green Paper will include working-age adults? I asked the Secretary of State for Health that question on Monday but did not get a full answer.

On the right to work, the Government have not done enough to remove the barriers that disabled people face. There is a lack of high-quality impairment-specific support. The Government’s flagship Disability Confident scheme does not measure the number of disabled people it has directly helped to move into work. Access to Work must be improved, extended and better publicised. Will the Minister consider removing the discriminatory cap?

Signatories to the CRPD are obliged to promote inclusive education. Under the Government, there has been regression and an increase in the number of special school places. What is the Minister doing to encourage her colleagues to improve inclusive education? In recent months, the Government have created a cross-ministerial body that is supposed to promote disability issues across Government, but at the same time they have cut the number of staff at the Office for Disability Issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth asked, what is the group’s scope? Where are its published terms of reference?

The Government are helping to organise a global summit in July, but why should any other state take them seriously on disability rights when they are systematically violating the rights of disabled people and continue to ignore the UN’s recommendations? When will the Government publish their response to the UN’s report?

When we get into power, the Labour Government will incorporate the convention into UK law, scrap the punitive sanctions regime, and replace the assessment regime with a more holistic, supportive assessment framework. It is a shame on the Government that we have to stand here today and debate this issue once again. They must take heed and listen.

10.48 am

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, as you have taken a lifelong interest in disabled people and made a personal difference by introducing the first piece of legislation specifically supporting people with autism. I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing her first Westminster Hall debate. Given the way she has approached it, I am sure it will not be the last. After

the Government publish our response to the UN inquiry, I will be more than happy to come back to this Chamber to debate it with her.

Before I respond to the individual points that hon. Members made, let me say that, like everyone else in this Chamber, I want to ensure that every disabled person and person with a health condition in our country has the opportunity to play a full part in society, including at work, when they can do so. Of course, there are disabled people who cannot work, and they must be supported. However, I utterly refute the allegations that the Government have discriminated against disabled people, systematically undermined and violated their human rights and, worst of all, that we are targeting their welfare support.

Debbie Abrahams: Will the Minister give way?

Sarah Newton: I have so little time and have been asked so many questions that I will not take an intervention.

The Government are utterly committed to the convention. Britain helped to develop and shape it, and we were one of the first countries in the world to sign and ratify it, in 2009. We are one of the very few nations that also ratified the convention’s optional protocol, which allows for individual complaints to be raised and permits the UN committee to investigate allegations of violations of the convention. That is what happened, and it was the first time it had happened. We were disappointed that the UN representatives who came to the UK simply did not take on board the evidence that the Government gave them and did not acknowledge the full range of support.

When we set out our response—I will set it out in full—we will clearly make our case and rebut the allegations levelled against us. We firmly believe that a disability or health condition should not dictate the path a person is able to take in life, including in society or in the workplace. That is the basis of everything we are doing to try to make sure that disabled people are able to realise their potential, including at work. We engage constructively with the United Nations and we have had constructive meetings, and I will of course meet all the reporting requirements in full.

As hon. Members will know, in line with the convention, disability is mainstreamed across the Government. I reassure everyone that we have strong legislation on our statute book to protect disabled people, through the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 and through the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Those protections are some of the strongest in the world.

The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) asked why we have not performed a cumulative impact assessment of our welfare reforms. We undertake cumulative assessments of reforms for each fiscal event, because we want to be as transparent as possible on the cumulative distributional impact of Government policies, including welfare reforms, tax changes—direct and indirect—and public spending changes. To present as full a picture as possible, we publish the living costs and food survey, which includes all the information that Members have mentioned.

All that information enables me to say clearly that the proportion of people in relative poverty in a family in which someone is disabled has not risen since 2010.

[Sarah Newton]

These allegations that we are driving people to food banks and forcing them into destitution are simply irresponsible. The proportion of people in absolute poverty in a family in which someone is disabled is at a record low, because we are spending more than £50 billion a year on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. That is up by £7 billion since 2010; it is around 2.5% of our gross domestic product and accounts for more than 6% of Government spending. As a share of our GDP, public spending on disability and incapacity is the second highest in the G7; only Germany spends more. Disability spending will be higher than 2010 in every year through the spending review. There has been no freeze in the benefits that disabled people receive, and those benefits are not subject to the benefit cap.

It is important that we hear the facts in these debates. Of course there is more we can do and of course I want to close the disability employment gap, but let us actually deal with the facts of the situation and stop this quite irresponsible talk that we have heard in this Chamber and that we hear in the main Chamber. Who will suffer because of what we have heard from Opposition Members today? It will be disabled people and their families, who will be frightened to come forward and claim the benefits and support available to them.

In my few remaining moments, I will touch on some of the criticisms that we have heard about personal independence payments and employment support allowance. PIP and ESA have been subject to a number of independent reviews, with the findings from the most recent, undertaken by Paul Gray, published last year, and to which I have published my response. I responded positively to each and every one of his recommendations. We are moving forward with continuous improvements to PIP.

The Work and Pensions Committee undertook a full inquiry into the assessment process, and it has welcomed my response and the series of measures we are taking, particularly the video recording of assessments. It is important to me that we build confidence and trust in that assessment process. We know from independent data that the vast majority of people undergoing a work capability assessment or a PIP assessment feel treated with respect and dignity, and that the system works. However, one person receiving poor treatment or not getting the right result is one too many, which is why we are so determined to implement all our reforms.

Those reforms stretch from working more closely with medical professionals, which was raised several times today, to making sure that it is easier for medical professionals to provide data to the process, that companions can support people in those assessments, that home visits are implemented wherever that could support people and that all the forms are in an accessible format. I actively consider implementing each and every suggestion put to me. I have a huge amount of stakeholder involvement with disabled people and people who represent them through our PIP forum and through a whole range of bodies under the Department for Work and Pensions. People are co-designing these benefit systems

with us. When PIP was introduced, it was developed with organisations that support disabled people and with disabled people themselves. We want to make sure that PIP remains a modern, dynamic benefit and that the Government treat people with mental health conditions equally seriously as people with physical health conditions.

Many more people are being supported and helped on PIP than they ever were under the disability living allowance legacy benefit. As we know, the evidence shows that more people receive higher rates of support on PIP than on DLA. Some 30% of people moved on to PIP get the highest levels of support; the figure was only 15% on DLA. It is important that disabled people or people with disabled family members who listen to and follow these debates know that there is support for them and that they should come confidently forward to receive it, in the full knowledge that, when we come across problems with the system, we work tirelessly to improve it.

There has been talk about Access to Work. We are very keen to see Access to Work grow and develop. We recently announced that the support available to each person each year is double the average income—that is just under £60,000 per person per year to support an individual into work. It is a demand-led scheme, and I am pleased that it grew by 8% last year. This is one budget that we are happy to see grow, because it means that more people are being supported into work.

I welcome the comments on Disability Confident, which is a growing and successful scheme, and I am grateful to the hon. Members here who have signed up to it. I hope more will come next week to the launch of the community challenge, where we will ask leaders in communities—that is us, as MPs in our local communities—to spend time in our summer recess dedicating ourselves to visiting businesses and employers and asking them to become disability confident and to provide more opportunities for disabled people in their communities. I hope as many people here as possible will come along to that event and will join in with those activities.

So many questions have been asked that I have not been able to answer. I will write back in detail on every point that has been made, so that we can all work together to make sure that every disabled person in our country is truly supported to be the best that they can be and to play as full a part as possible.

10.59 am

Rosie Duffield: I thank everybody here for making my first Westminster Hall debate so fantastic. The contributions by Members from across the House were really special. We heard passionate speeches, particularly from my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) and for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya), which were really moving. That is about it—I know we are out of time—so I thank you for your chairmanship and generosity, Dame Cheryl.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Government's response to the UN report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Rail Services: Cumbria

11 am

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of rail services in Cumbria.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I will try to make my speech a little shorter than it would have been, to allow time for the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), who shares my deep concerns on this issue.

The Lakes line, between Oxenholme and Windermere in my constituency, may be only a short, 12-mile stretch of railway, but when it comes to significance, it punches far above its length. The Lake district is in its first full year of being a world heritage site, meaning many thousands more tourists, at least, visiting our part of the world. The Lakes line is essential to those visitors accessing the astounding natural beauty of the national park and surrounding areas and the wonderful tourism industry that provides such a breadth of experiences for locals and visitors alike. Our tourism industry generates £3 billion a year, supports 60,000 jobs and is vital to our local economy, but the Lakes line service is not only used by tourists. It is also a key part of the lives of many locals. It is used by hundreds of commuting schoolchildren and workers and is a means of accessing vital services—or at least that is how it used to be. Over the past few months, that has all changed.

When 200 of us walked in protest along the length of the Lakes line 10 days ago, what had been a bustling line was deserted. There were no people at the stations and no trains on the tracks. And let us not fall into the trap of believing that the new timetables are entirely to blame for this catastrophe. Services on the Furness line and the Lakes line have been consistently failing and regularly cancelled ever since Northern took over the two lines in April 2016. This April alone saw 160 cancellations just on the Lakes line. By itself, that substandard provision would be totally unacceptable, but Northern has taken underperformance to new heights.

Like so many others in Cumbria, I was horrified to hear Northern's announcement on Monday 4 June that all trains on the Lakes line were to be completely suspended—a train line with no trains. The Northern franchise is huge, covering all the local and commuter services in the north-east, Yorkshire and almost all the north-west of England, yet since the introduction of Northern's interim timetable on 11 June, one in five of all the cancellations on the entire huge network has been on the relatively small Lakes line. Indeed, it is the only line in the country on which services have been completely suspended. That is beyond unsatisfactory; it is completely unacceptable.

However, Northern has not stopped there. We learned on Friday that Arriva Northern had extended the suspension by a further two weeks, to 2 July. That was possible only because the Government had rubber-stamped its request to extend that appalling suspension. A spokesperson for the Department for Transport said that it did not object to that “operational decision”, despite the fact that the Secretary of State himself had assured me that he was

“not prepared to accept more than the current two weeks”

and that he had been

“clear to Arriva that doing this over the long term is simply unacceptable”.—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 58.]

Those are the Secretary of State's own words, on the record, from the statement in the House of Commons on 4 June—words that he repeated to me and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness when we met him that evening. It sounds very much to me, and to many of us, as though the Secretary of State said one thing to the House on that Monday and in practice did the opposite on Friday.

This calamity could not have come at a worse time. The cancellations have occurred during the Easter holidays and through the May half-term, and they are now hitting the local economy during the early summer season. There are fears that the substandard or non-existent provision could stretch into the summer holidays.

Let me gently remind the Minister that we are not a dispensable backwater. After London, we are Britain's second biggest visitor destination. Our contribution to the UK economy is huge and our contribution to the broader British brand is unrivalled. The lack of trains has already had a catastrophic impact on the people of Cumbria, and the toll that it will inevitably take on the local economy could be enormous. Over the past few weeks, local young people taking their A-level and GCSE exams have found themselves stranded or late to school. People have missed hospital appointments and benefits assessments, while others have been regularly late to work. One woman I spoke to is having to move house from Staveley to Kendal just so that her kids can get to and from school every day and she is not blighted by the worry of her 12-year-old child being stranded in town and unable to get home.

Northern has not only failed to do its job, but completely undermined local confidence in this stretch of railway. My constituents are voting with their feet, and the sight of deserted train platforms along the line is now all too familiar. The replacement bus services are barely used by locals at all. Tourists use the service only because they see no alternative.

However, Northern's utter failure to do its job and provide adequate train services in Cumbria is not limited to the Lakes line. Over the past few months, the Lakes, Furness and Cumbrian coast lines have all experienced shocking services.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): There are also concerns about staffing levels at Northern. It is short of train crew to cover the new Cumbrian Coast timetable, and the Northern control centres are so overstretched that the routes in Cumbria seem to have fallen right to the bottom of its list of priorities. Over the past month, there have been daily cancellations of trains through Workington, including the last train of the day, which is a huge inconvenience and runs the risk of stranding people miles away from home, with no idea of how to get back. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the situation is simply unsustainable and that Northern is badly letting down thousands of people on a daily basis?

Tim Farron: I completely agree with everything that the hon. Lady has said. It feels to me very much as though all the lines in Cumbria are afterthoughts for Northern, given its huge empire. Many of the staffing

[Tim Farron]

problems would have been completely foreseeable and predictable by competent management who were planning for the future and had Cumbria's interests at heart, so the hon. Lady is absolutely right to say what she has said.

As I said, over the past few months the Lakes, Furness and Cumbrian Coast lines have all experienced shocking services. My constituents who use the stations at Arncliffe, Grange-over-Sands, Kents Bank and Carl have experienced service equally dreadful to that experienced by those who use Oxenholme, Kendal, Burneside, Staveley and Windermere. That is not the result of accidental oversight; it has been caused by a series of appalling decisions by both Northern and the Government.

There seem to be three main failings that must be identified and fixed. First, the Government's choice to cancel electrification of the Lakes line last year has very clearly contributed to the mess that we are in today. Northern took on the line on the understanding—this is the only excuse I will allow the company—that it would soon be running electric trains, and it planned and ordered on that basis. Because of the Government's decision to cancel electrification, on the basis of inaccurate figures that must now be revisited, Northern were forced quickly to borrow from Scotland old diesel trains that their drivers were not trained to run.

Secondly, the Government awarded the Lakes line and Furness line franchises to Arriva Northern from April 2016. This was an unfolding disaster from day one, given the removal of good services from TransPennine and the introduction of substandard stock and service from Northern. The Minister should undo that mistake today and take the Furness and Lakes lines off Northern. It has clearly breached the terms of its contract: it is contracted to run trains and it has failed to do so.

Thirdly, we have seen incompetence from Northern and inertia from the Government. The fact that no statement was made to Parliament on the crisis until 4 June, despite months of poor performance and despite many of us raising the matter in the weeks and months beforehand—I raised it at Prime Minister's questions and at Transport questions weeks before it came to the House of the Government's own volition—leaves many of us questioning the Government's commitment to those of us in the far north-west.

When the Secretary of State did finally make a statement to the House, it was in part to explain that he had permitted Northern not only to cancel trains, but to cancel an entire line for what turned out to be a month. That cancellation is as unprecedented as it is unacceptable.

In the last few days, a number of us have chosen to prove that we could and would do what the Government and Northern rail could or would not. On Sunday, thanks to the Lakes line rail user group, West Coast Railways and many other volunteers, we began a temporary and limited, but reliable and glorious, service on the Lakes line. The Lakelanders have been successfully running on that line for the last four days, and it has kept to time.

Many in Government and the rail industry have helped us—they know who they are, and they probably would not thank me if I named them—but many have not been so helpful. As we have gone through the

process of reintroducing trains to England's most picturesque railway line, we have seen from the inside the lack of co-ordination and can-do spirit in some parts of Government and the rail industry. Never have I seen so much buck-passing or excuse-making as I have in the last few days. Despite that, we now have a limited but excellent service on the Lakes line—a heritage operator on a commuter route.

I do not need to tell hon. Members that that is not a long-term solution, so I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm what action he plans to take. Will he remove the Lakes and Furness lines from Northern as a matter of urgency and run those services directly from the Department until a suitable operator can be identified with the necessary resources, competence and commitment that those two superb lines deserve? The Secretary of State told me and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness that he would look at that option two weeks ago, so what progress have the Government made?

Will the Minister look again at the case for the electrification of the Lakes line? We now know that the Secretary of State cancelled the electrification last year based on figures that were ludicrously inaccurate. The model that he threw out was based on a service with trains running on at least two tracks, at 125 mph and at intervals of less than two minutes. I respectfully remind the Minister that a brief look at the Lakes line demonstrates that we require none of those things. As a result of using that inaccurate model, it was assumed that the electrification would cost more than double what it would cost to electrify the line in reality. Given the enormous damage done to the reputation of the Lakes line by Northern and the Government, does the Minister agree that the best way to show ongoing commitment to it would be to keep the Government's initial promise to electrify the line?

Will the Minister fulfil the promise made to me by the Secretary of State in yesterday's debate to ensure funding to support a marketing campaign to repair and boost the reputation of the Lakes line and of the wider Cumbrian economy? I have forwarded a formal bid for that package to him. I am grateful to Cumbria Tourism, which I asked to draft that proposal and which came up with an excellent bid. I understand that the Minister spoke to the chief executive of Cumbria Tourism this morning, and I am grateful to him for that, so I hope that he will be able to announce today that he will endorse that bid.

Given the chaos on our railways, will the Minister clarify his and the Secretary of State's powers? On the east coast main line, it appears that the Government have the power to remove a franchise from an operator because the shareholders deem it unprofitable. However, Northern, which has demonstrated an inability to run a basic train service, still retains its franchise. Why has the Secretary of State not intervened? Is it because he does not have the power? In that case, when will the Government seek such powers from Parliament? I, for one, would be happy to vote to grant them. Or is it that he has those powers but has chosen not to use them, in which case he has quite some explaining to do to the people of Cumbria?

It appears that the Government are prepared to take a line away from a rail company when shareholders are losing money, but when passengers are left stranded and are forced to miss work and school, they simply look the other way. That raises the question: what is the

purpose of the railways? Are they a public service that underpins our economy, or simply an opportunity for private profit at public expense?

In arranging the Lakes line temporary shuttle service over the last few days, it has become clear that when there is a commitment to a railway line, a passion to serve local people and a determination to succeed, anything is possible. The question is: is the Northern franchise not simply too big and too unwieldy for its own good? Would it not be better for the Cumbrian lines to be taken out of the franchise altogether and run as a micro-franchise so that the people who run our lines are also the people who are committed to them?

I was walking with my children along the old railway line at Sandside between Milnthorpe and Arnsdale last week. We talked about what had happened to that old line—why it had been closed, the tracks removed and the viaduct dismantled. The Beeching axe fell more than half a century ago on lines that the industry had given up on. It is painfully clear to all of us that Northern has given up on Cumbria. For the sake of everyone who relies on the Lakes and Furness lines, from local students and commuters to our millions of visitors, I call on the Minister to give Northern its marching orders. The travellers of Cumbria are at the end of their tether and, frankly, so am I.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): With permission of the hon. Member who moved the motion, I call John Woodcock for a brief contribution.

11.15 am

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I congratulate you, Dame Cheryl, on your elevation. I thank the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for his generosity in allowing me a couple of minutes to speak. I congratulate him on securing the debate and on the key role he clearly played in getting a rail service running on the Lakes line.

I will add a couple of remarks about the Furness line and the Cumbria coast line, which are integral parts of the package. I agree with all the calls the hon. Gentleman made. Surely, there is a case that Northern has broken the terms of its contract across its network, particularly in Cumbria, so there must be a case for stepping in in the way that he described.

The Minister must be aware that the Cumbria coast line's passenger numbers have shown a frightening drop-off since Northern came in. At a time when we are building a world-class civil nuclear corridor, that is clearly not in the country's interest. On the Furness line, there has been a 500% increase in cancellations since Northern took over the franchise. The recent upsurge in trains running has been made possible, as the company admits, only because the Lakes line has not been running so drivers have been available. In rectifying the problems on the Lakes line, I make a plea to the Minister not to rob Peter to pay Paul. The Furness line and the Cumbria coast line are absolutely vital.

Surely, it is time to admit that the move by the Government and the company to impose driver-only operated trains and to ban vital and popular guards from trains was wrong. The Government can make things better for passengers who are suffering yet more strike action because of that wrong-headed move.

11.17 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) on securing this debate, which gives us the chance to discuss the Lakes line and Northern in some detail. That is important at this time of significant disruption to passenger services, which affects his constituents and those of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), who also made some powerful points. Let me not forget the points made by the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) on behalf of her constituents.

I want to remind all hon. Members that the Department's overriding priority is to restore the reliability of the service across the network. The Secretary of State has left franchise owners, including Northern, under no illusion that they must urgently improve their operational performance. We are also seeking to ensure that we learn all the lessons of why we are in this position and of what has happened since the introduction of the timetable on 20 May, so we have commissioned an independent report by Stephen Glaister, the chair of the Office of Rail and Road.

On Northern's performance, passengers have experienced unacceptable disruption to their journeys on parts of the network, particularly on the Lakes line. There is a very long way to go until performance reaches what anyone would regard as a reasonable level, but, as I said yesterday, there are signs of improvement. We are starting to turn a corner. The introduction of a temporary timetable by Northern on 4 June will start to rebuild passengers' trust. The first signs are promising. Industry figures show that over the first two weeks of the reduced timetable, 80% of trains arrived on time and 4% of trains were cancelled or arrived significantly late. That compares to the previous two-week period when 66% of trains arrived on time and an average of 12% of trains were cancelled or significantly late. That is clearly not yet good enough by any stretch; I am not by any means suggesting that. What is important is that we build on that improvement and ensure that over the coming weeks Northern makes further progress towards restoring journeys and reducing disruption as rapidly as possible. Northern plans to run that timetable until the end of July, when it will review progress and hopes to significantly increase the number of timetabled services while continuing to ensure increasing stability.

On the Lakes line, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has said, Northern took the decision to implement an interim timetable from the morning of 4 June and, within that timetable, to effect a temporary suspension of all its services on the Lakes line. That was an operational decision taken by Northern and accepted by Transport for the North, which co-manages the franchise along with the Department for Transport, as the best temporary solution for passengers. That gave the operator greater flexibility to allocate work and training, and it concentrates resources on providing a more resilient train service on wider parts of the network, while providing Lakes line passengers with a more reliable service.

Tim Farron: The Minister says that Transport for the North and the Department for Transport share the franchise. Can he clarify that the Department was asked for and granted permission to extend the suspension of services on the Lakes line?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, I can confirm that the franchise is co-managed by Transport for the North, which represents the 19 local transport authorities and local businesses, and the Department for Transport, through the Rail North Partnership. The Rail North Partnership accepted Northern's operational decision, and the Department for Transport did not accept the decision that went to the Transport for the North board and to the Department for Transport for approval.

The Transport Secretary has been very clear that the line must be open as soon as possible, and Northern is working to keep customers on the move, especially with the tourist season soon reaching its busiest time. From 11 June, the bus service was increased to a pattern of three buses an hour, compared with the usual hourly train service. As well as Northern, both Transport for the North and Transport Focus have been working to obtain feedback from passengers about the replacement bus service. I understand that there has been recognition that the bus service is regarded as acceptable.

I am aware that an open-access operator, West Coast Railways, has agreed access with Network Rail and holds a valid safety certificate with the Office of Rail and Road, permitting it to run services. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale on his efforts in galvanising services along the route. In the meantime, the Rail North Partnership and the Department have focused on the introduction of full scheduled Northern services. I am pleased to note the announcement yesterday of a shuttle service between Oxenholme and Windermere offering 12 services daily to commence from 2 July. Northern has consulted Cumbria County Council, the Rail North Partnership and Transport for the North on the details of that shuttle service, which will be an important next step for the resumption of high-quality services in the Lakes area.

On why problems happened and what is being done about them, as hon. Members know, Northern has faced a shortage in the availability of drivers with appropriate route and traction knowledge in various locations, which has, unfortunately, led to far more delays and cancellations to train services. As a result of the delay to electrification schemes in the north-west, Northern is currently undertaking a significant training plan for drivers. That training is planned to continue until the end of July. Northern has also worked hard with ASLEF regarding the situation around rest day working and is hopeful of finding a longer-term resolution that will improve performance. Once the problems are resolved, we will have a much better service for passengers. I understand that that is small comfort to them when things are not working as they should, but once we are through this difficult period, we will have a better railway at the end of it, particularly once all the new trains start to arrive later this year.

On compensation, we are clear that passengers on the lines that have been severely affected will receive additional compensation. My Department is working closely with Network Rail, train operators and stakeholders to introduce a special compensation scheme as soon as possible. We have already recommended to the board of Transport for the North that passengers who buy weekly, monthly or annual tickets on Northern and TPE-affected routes should be eligible to claim up to four weeks' compensation. We are inviting Transport for the North to work with the operators on the detail of the scheme, which will be

announced by the operators in due course so that passengers make compensation claims from early July. I hope that Transport for the North's board will be able to confirm the final details of the compensation scheme by the time of its next board meeting on 28 June, so that payments can begin to flow in July.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale asked about support for the northern economy. We are looking at options to support the Northern economy further, and we expect Northern to fund a marketing campaign encouraging travel to affected areas by train, including the Lakes line when it resumes operation by Northern.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness asked structural questions about the shape of the franchise and its future. I understand that passengers have been frustrated by the changes that have happened since services were transferred from TPE to Northern a couple of years ago. The rolling stock is not as good, and reliability has suffered in a way that is not acceptable. There was also understandable disappointment that the Lakes line will not be electrified as previously planned.

Tim Farron: To press the Minister on that point, I spoke to Mark Carne a couple of weeks ago and he said he would look again at electrification of the Lakes line. Admittedly, that was before I criticised his award of a CBE, but I hope that he does not take that personally. I would be grateful if the Minister paid serious attention to the possibility of reopening that case, given the evidence I put forward in my speech.

Joseph Johnson: We are looking very carefully at how we can deliver the passenger benefits that electrification would have delivered along the Lakes line. We are continually assessing projects to ensure they offer the best approach. Technology, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is advancing very quickly, and the Government are committed to using the most suitable, practical and affordable approach to modernising each part of the network. Bi-mode trains and other technologies mean that we do not need to electrify every bit of every line to achieve significant improvements, and we will electrify lines only where it delivers a genuine benefit to passengers.

Northern will begin work to explore the possibility of deploying alternative-fuel trains on the route by 2021. It will be a trial to pilot trains capable of using the electrified mainline to Manchester airport and then switching to battery power sources on the Lakes line. Until that happens, the Secretary of State has committed to new trains operating on that line from 2019, subject to the business case.

All stations on the Northern network will benefit from a £38 million investment in bringing stations up to standard, delivering new platform seating, replacement shelters, new waiting rooms and toilets and customer information screens. That will be delivered by the station improvement fund and will also include ticket machines, real-time information and help points at every station with at least 10 passengers using it every day. There will be an additional £9 million investment in making stations more inclusive and accessible.

The Department, working through the Rail North Partnership, is putting in place an action plan for Northern, which includes improving driver rostering to get more trains running now, increasing driver training on new

routes, additional contingency drivers and management presence at key locations in Manchester and putting extra peak services in the timetable along the Bolton corridor. Northern has also announced that, until the end of July, it will run fewer services than were originally planned, per the May timetable, to give passengers greater certainty and to increase opportunities for driver training. That temporary measure is necessary to stabilise the service, enabling improvements to be introduced.

I hope that I have reassured hon. Members of the seriousness with which the Government are taking the disruption facing passengers. We are taking action to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, to compensate passengers and to learn the lessons that will help prevent such problems happening in future.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

UK Intergovernmental Co-operation

[PHIL WILSON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK constitutional machinery and frameworks for intergovernmental co-operation.

It is a pleasure, Mr Wilson, to serve under your chairmanship.

I am a Unionist by conviction. I have an English mother and a Scottish father; two of my children have married people from Northern Ireland; and three of my four children now live in England. I am also a proud Scot. For me, as for many Scots, the Union is personal; it is social; and it speaks to the heart. It is about family; we are literally a family of nations.

I believe that the people of Stirling, and the people of all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom, expect their Governments at all levels to work together for the common good of all people. Those of us privileged to serve in the House of Commons have a special responsibility to engage in a relentless mission to see that people's expectations are met. To that end, I propose that we now need to address inadequacies in the constitutional machinery and frameworks, in order to create a better and more functional Union.

Of course, with devolution comes divergence and I embrace that, where it is needed, but I am not interested in creating divisions and differences for the sake of it. Diverse as the nations and regions of the UK are, we also need to work together and to remain united, and deliberate in our determination to do so.

The United Kingdom has now a fairly complex structure of governance. In academic circles, phrases such as "asymmetrical devolution" are used to describe the Union's complex governance structures. That is a product of the organic way in which the constitution has developed over time. We have had devolution for Scotland and Wales, which required a new way of working; then we had the Good Friday agreement, which required further changes; and then we added more powers for Scotland and Wales. That has all left us in a position where governmental structures are convoluted, complex and, in my opinion, not entirely fit for purpose.

In Scotland, we have a full Parliament with wide-ranging legislative and executive powers, but the powers of the Welsh Assembly are different, and the same is true of the Northern Ireland Assembly. England is governed by the UK Government. However, there are also emerging and exciting visions of local democracy in England, with regional and metropolitan Mayors working to galvanise communities and to bring democratic accountability closer to the people.

That is very different from the situation in, for example, the United States, or in other federal regimes, where the nature of government at state and national level is derived from a uniform constitution that treats all the constituent parts of the country equally. I am not a proponent of such federalism, because imposing an artificial uniformity on our constitutional arrangements would undermine the diversity that makes the United Kingdom unique. The situation in Scotland is different from that in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and

[Stephen Kerr]

to argue otherwise is to ignore centuries of history and our present-day realities. So, understanding how these different Parliaments and levels of Government relate to one another, given their different competencies, is vital to this Parliament.

What, then, is the current situation with inter-governmentalism in the United Kingdom? The process is governed by a 1999 memorandum of understanding that set out the intentions for how joint working and co-operation should work. There is also a series of concordats that set out the structure for how devolved Administrations should work with the UK Government to ensure that there is co-ordination on certain issues.

The memorandum of understanding then outlines how the Joint Ministerial Committee should work. The JMC is the main way in which such joint working can happen. There are three main elements: to consider where there are devolved issues that will be affected by non-devolved decision making; to consider where there should be joint working on devolved issues; and the resolution of disputes.

The JMC is high-level, chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by the leaders of all the devolved Governments and the Secretaries of State for each of the territorial offices. In the formative years of devolution—from 1999 to 2004—the JMC hardly, if ever, met. The 1999 memorandum of understanding comes from a time when Labour was in power in Westminster, Holyrood and Cardiff. That meant that issues could mostly be dealt with through the internal structures and workings of the Labour party.

As with so many things, the way that Labour approached this situation was without any thought for a future that did not involve them in government. Labour assumed it would be in the respective seats of government in Westminster, Holyrood and Cardiff in perpetuity, and the whole machinery of government was run out of No. 10 or No. 11 Downing Street. Scottish Labour, in the words of a former Labour leader, was run as a branch office of the Blair-Brown axis. In part, that was why Tony Blair once described the power of the Scottish Parliament as being akin to that of an English parish council.

That arrogance in power is what led the people of Scotland to reject Scottish Labour. I remember the days when Conservative voters in Scotland would choose positively to vote for the Scottish National party to get Labour out, and certainly not because of nationalist sympathies. It hardly seems necessary for me to say this, but it is changed days now. The decade since 2007, which followed the end of Labour rule in Scotland and the election of an SNP Scottish Executive, has repeatedly served to show up how inadequate and incomplete the constitutional machinery is. These years have been characterised by growing party political mistrust and division.

Nationalism feeds on discord; it feeds on any grievance that can be created. We saw that last week, when the SNP Members stormed out of the main Chamber of the House of Commons. Theatrics aside, that told the story of how nationalism works. Nationalism works by cynically manipulating imagined slights; it works by stoking our fears and worst instincts. And when there are gaps in the constitutional machinery that should

bring Governments and Parliaments together, as I contend there are, those gaps become a wide open space for the manufacture of grievance and division.

Nationalism does not instinctively seek to work co-operatively. I am surprised that even now well-meaning and sincere colleagues from across the House misunderstand the politics of Scottish nationalism. Those colleagues believe that if we are all courteous and reasonable, and show a willingness to compromise to reach an agreement, that approach will be reciprocated.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate. Although what he says about nationalism is true, does he agree that at the other end of this equation his party is currently also using this situation to aid its best interests? What we are seeing here is a fight between two of Scotland's Governments, which serve two political parties and not the people of Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The fractious relationship between the Governments of Scotland serves nobody's purposes, and it serves no good purpose to have the situation continue.

To be clear, when nationalists walk into a negotiation they are not looking for a way to build a consensus that works for everyone; they would far rather walk out in a huff, having achieved nothing, because that fits with their agenda of conflict and grievance. For them, it is always about the politics and never the outcomes. They would rather have the argument than the solution.

There is no doubt that the nationalists create jurisdictional confusion for their political advantage. If we consider how the public sector in Scotland is run through the civil service and, perhaps more importantly, local health boards and local government, we see that differences between English and Scottish regulatory systems allow a wall to be built around the Scottish public sector. However, when we scratch the surface, we see that the differences between the system in Scotland and the systems in the rest of the United Kingdom are actually not so great. This separation creates separatism; it is moving us apart; and it builds a wall around Scotland.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech; he is speaking very passionately and articulating clearly the challenges that we face in Scotland now, given the new and evolving democratic position that we find ourselves in. However, in my own area in the borders, we have the borderlands growth deal, which is a very good example of having communities on either side of the border facing the same challenges. The Governments are coming together; the councils are coming together; and we will hopefully find solutions and investment. It is very disappointing, therefore, that the Scottish Government have indicated that they might withdraw from the JMC and stop the delivery of these growth deals, which would mean that those communities would lose out on that investment.

Stephen Kerr: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and for the information he brings to the debate. What he describes would be a tragic outcome for everyone, but he underlines the point I am trying to make, which

is that the emphasis on differences is not always true. The wall I am describing cements a nationalist agenda of Scottish exceptionalism and difference. It discourages working across borders. The border is used as a barrier to seek to limit the building of partnerships throughout the United Kingdom.

Glasgow City Council has more in common with Manchester and Birmingham City Councils than it does with Argyll and Bute, but they are lumped together incongruously to satisfy a geographic and nationalist imperative. Similarly, the problems of rural health boards are not dissimilar, regardless of whether they are on one side of the border or the other. It is a real shame that the arrangements for the devolved settlements do not contain references to partnership working, other than at ministerial level. Instead, we have created a system that allows for the creation of division and separation, rather than one that encourages partnership and innovation.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman makes some interesting propositions on collaborative working at a number of different levels, but the current primary mechanism is the Joint Ministerial Committee. Does he agree that it is currently pointless, as it has no authority? It needs to be put on a statutory footing to give it proper teeth. I am perturbed, because the hon. Gentleman voted down a proposed amendment that would have done that. Why did he do that?

Stephen Kerr: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said. I welcome his intervention. I will come on to the point he raised. It has also become the norm with the current arrangements that Scotland's two Governments conduct their business by megaphone rather than by meeting, speaking and perhaps even listening. There is no imperative that means they must sit down and listen to each other, which speaks to the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), and that is just not right. Regionalism is a positive example of how things could be made to work.

The recently established metropolitan Mayors by necessity work with different levels of government. They work with the councils across their regions and with the UK Government. That in turn builds a broad-based coalition of partners that seems to work well, criss-crossing local rivalries and party political loyalties for the good of the region. It encourages compromise and the sharing of objectives. Andy Burnham, the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, must work with Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors, and he also must work closely with Conservative Government Ministers. He must negotiate and compromise, as all the Mayors do, but of course none of them are nationalists.

The arrangements for the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies do not encompass that vision of partnering. They seem to me to be tokenistic and designed to create a hierarchy of importance that is not in keeping with a vision of partnership unionism. The history of the JMC is that it meets irregularly on an ad hoc basis, with little or no formal recognition of the value of joint working. There is limited transparency on what happens at those meetings and what difference they make. They are exclusively focused on the Government-to-Government business of the moment. There is no structure for formal departmental or inter-parliamentary working, or for local government agencies or other national

agencies to work together. There is so much to be gained by creating those networks and forums as part of the process of the machinery of the Union.

There are examples in the world of how things can be made to work better. The Canadian system is a case in point. It is federal in nature, but the different provinces and territories have different levels of local control, and the parliamentary system has important similarities with that of the UK. The Canadians have a national Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth, headed by a Cabinet Minister—the so-called Unity Minister. So important is that role to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that he performs it himself. It is not as simple as being a command and control network from the federal Government. Far from it—the Ministry's remit is far deeper than establishing national guidance or control for the provincial and territorial governments. It is responsible for encouraging joint working between the provinces and territories and the local government agencies.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend has spoken precisely about the Canadian situation. He is coming from a Scottish point of view, but does he see the parallel with our position in Europe? There is an intergovernmental body in existence already, called the Council of Europe. We should be using it more as the framework for the future.

Stephen Kerr: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the Council of Europe, and I am going to talk about Europe. I will return to Canada for a moment, though, because there is a plethora of joint working agencies across Canada engaged in educational, infrastructural, economic, health and environmental works. The support mechanism is a secretariat that seems to be independent of the federal Executive. The body is drawn from civil servants from across the Canadian public sector and exists to support intergovernmental co-operation at all levels. It encourages and facilitates meetings, helping provincial, territorial, federal and local government leaders to arrange sessions and meetings on any subject. They call it collaborative federalism, and it encourages a sense of national unity, even in a federation where there are nationalist elements. There are lessons for the United Kingdom here.

I propose a partnership Unionism. At present, we have the Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland Offices. It has often been thought that merging them would create efficiencies for the UK Government, but in doing so we would lose a lot of the point of those Departments. The idea is that they give voice to the nations of the Union within the UK Government and are the UK Government's voice in the nations that they serve. Rather than thinking about merging them and reducing the role of the respective Secretaries of State, it would be far better to think of an entirely better way of working.

There is a statement in the memorandum of understanding of 1999 that says that

"the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for ensuring that the interests of those parts of the UK in non-devolved matters are properly represented and considered."

Part of the issue here, however, is the role of the territorial Offices of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Departments that have a Union responsibility, such as the Treasury, the Department for Business,

[*Stephen Kerr*]

Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for International Trade and so forth, depend too much on the territorial Offices. They should not be channelling their activities through a territorial Department; they should be actively involved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on a direct basis and to a greater extent. I feel very strongly about that.

The Departments that have an area of responsibility covering the whole of the Union should be active in all the nations and regions of the Union, not only in England. Please do not short-change my constituents. We pay our taxes, elect a Government and have every right to expect that the Union Departments are working for us across the United Kingdom.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What the hon. Gentleman seems to be proposing would fundamentally undermine the principle of devolution.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely not. On the contrary, what I am proposing will be another support to the functioning of devolution, because it will bring the nations and regions of the United Kingdom together, so that we can have better governance in all parts of the United Kingdom. As I said earlier, I feel very strongly about the issue.

The Union Departments that work in Scotland should not be working through the prism of the Scotland Office. In the eyes of the Scottish people, there needs to be more to the UK Government presence in Scotland than the Scotland Office. It is not an easy task by any means to operate a territorial Office; the expertise required stretches across all aspects of government, and the territorial offices have relatively small budgets to staff themselves. The expectation that they can have expertise across all aspects of government is unrealistic.

We must also banish any notion of “devolve and forget” on the part of the Departments that serve the whole Union. Can we please ensure that there is no tendency on the part of those Ministers who have a direct responsibility for matters in Scotland to walk on eggshells and tiptoe around issues, rather than authoritatively dealing with them, as they would in any other part of the UK? The people of Scotland want the UK Government to act, and they have every right to expect them to do so. Surely, Ministers of the Crown are not nervous about upsetting nationalists? I can report that I have seen no evidence of such an attitude from the Ministers I have worked with.

Part of the confusion here is a genuine misunderstanding of which Departments are genuinely UK-wide and which Departments are England-only. A renaming of Departments that relate to England to clearly mark them as Departments for England, such as having the “Department of Health and Social Care for England” and the “Department for Education for England”, would help with the demarcation. It may require some rejigging of departmental responsibilities. I find it very difficult to understand how a Department can possibly have both England-only and Union responsibilities. The Home Office, for example, should be the UK Department for Borders and Security; prisons and policing in England should be passed to the Justice Department for England.

Deidre Brock: Is the hon. Gentleman proposing an English Parliament? Many people would support him in that objective.

Stephen Kerr: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I am proposing nothing for England. It is up to the people of England to decide what kind of governance they want. I am proposing a better way to operate the Union to serve all parts of the United Kingdom.

My proposal would help the Health and Social Care Secretaries for Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland to sit together in a council of equals and discuss matters of mutual concern, allowing joint working and the cross-fertilisation of ideas. It would be the same for education, policing, transport and a multitude of other issues. The creation of a new and powerful Department of the Union at Cabinet level would help to bind that together and encourage joint working. That is especially important because leaving the European Union will require us to come up with new frameworks that will need to be negotiated between the devolved Governments. Those frameworks would allow for mutual esteem and respect.

Intergovernmental conferences should be a big deal, not an ad hoc tick-box exercise to satisfy a memorandum of understanding. Those in political leadership should be required to hold such meetings regularly and to have a Department that drives a partnership agenda. The Department of the Union should be established with civil servants seconded from across the United Kingdom, not simply from Whitehall, to encourage a culture of mutual respect and the dissemination of ideas throughout the country. Its remit should reach beyond the national Government level to the local level—not in a statutory or interfering way, but in a positive way that encourages Governments and politicians to work together.

The Department would have at its core the principle of early intervention in conflict resolution. It would be designed to ensure that conflict is avoided and consensus achieved before there is any hint of a full-blown confrontation.

Deidre Brock: I am really interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Given the behaviour of the UK Government towards Scotland over the past few weeks, and last week in particular, it seems to me that they are not particularly interested in what Scotland or Scots have to say.

Stephen Kerr: With the greatest respect, I have never heard such nonsense. The opposite is the case. The United Kingdom Government are determined to ensure that powers repatriated from Brussels go to the Scottish Parliament, and the SNP voted against that last week. We should never forget that.

Mr Sweeney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Kerr: I will give way one more time, and then I should finish.

Mr Sweeney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generosity. He mentioned local government, which is an important aspect of the equation. This is not merely about devolved powers residing in Holyrood; it is a question of the over-centralisation of government in Scotland itself. Scotland is actually the most centralised country in Europe in terms of governance. We have to radically address that distribution of power within Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: I could not agree more. We need to look closely at what has resulted from 11 years of SNP Government in Edinburgh. It is highly centralised and it is denuding our democracy at a local, grass-roots level.

When there is a dispute or an argument, there must be a formal process for arbitration and ultimately for judgment. It is still right and proper that the ultimate judgment in matters of constitutional law should be reserved to the Supreme Court, but such a referral should be seen as failure of the model that I am outlining. We should take the best lessons from the Canadian system and from our experience in the European Union. We should build on the strengths of the EU Commission model to ensure that all parts of the Union are engaged. That may require politicians to think beyond their existing positions and more strategically than they do today.

The EU has also created a series of structures designed to draw the union closer together. The Committee of the Regions was a good example of that, where local government was involved in the decision-making structure. That gave an incentive for local government to get involved and work together across the EU. It helped to draw people together and to forge friendships and working partnerships. We need the same for the UK, and a statutory meeting of local government across the UK would be a good foundation to build that on, supported by a secretariat from the Department of the Union.

My vision is for a system that is underpinned by statute, where an independent body provides a secretariat for intergovernmental working, replicating that which occurs in the Canadian and European systems. It would be founded in a spirit of co-operation, and laws would need to be passed to ensure that it was funded and given the authority to co-ordinate that kind of joint working. We would need to give it the kudos to attract and retain talent, and it would need to be at the heart of the Governments in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and London.

The ideas that I am presenting are fairly simple ones that would allow the Union to flourish. Learning from the Canadian and EU experience would allow a new partnership and allow Unionism to emerge by stark contrast to divisive nationalism. I love the Union, and it remains under threat by nationalism. Those of us who believe in it have an immovable duty to work together to see that it is strengthened, renewed and remains relevant to the lives of the people of our country. There is something here too for the nationalists who want to see a country where the machinery of government works for the common good of all. It is about our mission to build a better country and a better future.

Today's debate should be the start of a dialogue. I invite all my colleagues who want to make our country work better to come forward and give their ideas for a realignment of our constitutional machinery. We must work together to resolve our differences and problems, rather than shout at each other over the media or the Floor of the House. I know the public in Stirling and the rest of the United Kingdom would like us to do that. They are fed up of the point scoring and petty politics. They want politicians to be mature, to act maturely and to work together to build a better United Kingdom for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. Six Members are standing. If hon. Members stick to five minutes for their speeches to allow everybody in, I will not have to impose an official time limit.

2.56 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate and under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Wilson. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for the tone and the manner in which he presented the debate. We have seen over the last week or so in this Parliament what can be achieved if people work together constructively, rather than perform petty political stunts that merely fan the flames of what we are trying to fight against.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a fractious relationship between the UK and Scottish Governments, which there certainly is. I made the point in the House this week that we have to try to find a way for both parties to come together, because the current stand-off, particularly on some of the major issues regarding devolution and our withdrawal from the European Union, cannot be sustained in the long term. We have to find a way for both Governments to put aside their problems, to get round the table and to try to thrash out a negotiation. A negotiation has to involve compromise. There have been very few negotiations in history on major issues where both parties have got 100% of what they wanted. There needs to be a willingness for both sides to compromise, and I am not sure at this stage if that ability to compromise is there.

We know the structure of both Governments working together is written down in a 1999 memorandum of understanding. In fact, Tony Blair, whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and Jack McConnell the former First Minister said at the time that they wished to remove it, because they did not think that the Joint Ministerial Committee, in the way it had been set up, was constructive and would take things forward. We now have some real problems with devolution. It worked when Scotland was Scottish Labour, Wales was Welsh Labour and there was a UK Labour Government. Government was able to function, probably because of the more informal ways that the Governments could talk, rather than through the formal JMC.

I took umbrage at a bit of what the hon. Gentleman said. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) was right. I tabled an amendment to the Scotland Bill that would have put the Joint Ministerial Committee on a statutory footing and set out agendas, minutes, publication, involvement and a mechanism for resolving disputes. The Conservative Government at the time completely dismissed that and voted against the amendment.

During the debate on the Sewel convention, I tabled an amendment that would have taken the word "normally" out of the convention, so the UK Government could not legislate in devolved areas unless they went through the process of the JMC and a formal dispute resolution mechanism. The Opposition have been trying to be helpful this week—indeed, we have been trying to be helpful for a number of years—regarding legislation on the Floor of the House. The hon. Member for Stirling was not in the House at the time, but his party voted against our amendments.

[Ian Murray]

We have to get off this grievance agenda. I have no problem with the SNP's stunt of walking out of the Chamber. It elevated an issue to the front pages from pages seven or eight, because we were unable to get media interest in those big issues. I have no problem with that kind of stunt, but does it really serve the interests of the people whom we are here to represent? We have to find a way forward.

The key point is that there is absolutely no trust whatsoever between the Scottish Government and the UK Government at the moment. Until we can find a way of building that trust, the only people who will suffer are the people of Scotland, who voted in 2014 to remain part of the United Kingdom, who voted for the Scottish parliamentary set-up that we have at the moment and who voted for their contribution to the UK Government in terms of the votes in Scotland. The people have spoken and would expect both Governments to get on with it, and will be very frustrated at the moment. I agree with the tone and tenure of what the hon. Gentleman is trying to achieve. I hope that the Minister will listen to some of those very brave ideas and bring some forward.

I will finish with an example. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Canada, but in the provisions of the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, he will find it written down how the north of Ireland and the Republic work together cross-border on a whole manner of issues—how that holds together is one of the biggest concerns in the post-Brexit Britain environment. There are examples out there in Canada and across the globe of how Governments can find formal mechanisms to work together, but there is also one on our border across the Irish sea. If the hon. Gentleman was to bring a ten-minute rule Bill to the House, proposing something written in a legislative form, it would certainly get my backing. I am sure that it would get the backing of the whole House if we could find a mechanism for both Governments to work better together in a more formal setting.

I would say this to the hon. Gentleman: knock on the door of the Secretary of State at Dover House and get him to publish the proper minutes of the Joint Ministerial Committee on the issues of devolution, so that we can find out whether it is the Conservative party or the Scottish National party that is frustrating it. I think that I know the answer to that question already, but the Scottish public deserve to see exactly what is going on. Until we have transparency, we will all be in the dark about how both Governments work together.

3.1 pm

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your direction, Mr Wilson. I congratulate my colleague and constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), on securing this important debate. I will start on a positive note—the recent signing of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city deal, which is a prime example of what can be achieved when different levels of government work together to achieve for their constituencies.

The key point about devolution in this country is that reserved powers are as important to the devolution settlement as devolved powers. Schedule 5(1) of the

Scotland Act 2016 is very specific. Westminster is as vital to devolution as Holyrood. That is why we have directly elected Scottish MPs. If anyone ever doubts the influence of Scotland in Westminster, they should just look at the Conservative Government, which would not be standing if it were not for the seats held by Scottish Conservatives—[Interruption]—within the Conservative party itself.

Devolution has so far been a completely one-way street. With the Bill that is currently in the House, we will have 80 more powers transferred to the Scottish Parliament that have never before sat with Scotland. My hon. Friend raised some important questions about the structure of how we want to govern for our constituencies and for the United Kingdom. Devolution was not meant to build a wall between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. It was not meant to separate Scotland off. It was meant to bring power closer to the communities that that power is meant to serve.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that devolution should not be looked at as a wall. Does he agree that we are talking about not just how the United Kingdom operates within a governmental mechanism and how we can devolve governance and politics, but how we can also devolve the economy and employment? An awful lot of the time nationalism feeds on dissatisfaction and unemployment, and that is why we need to try to address the problems that exist right across the United Kingdom.

Luke Graham: I could not agree more. I think devolution has been a response to the failures of previous Governments of all colours to serve all nations and regions of the United Kingdom. I will come on shortly to the point that has been raised, and I have raised previously, about the centralisation of power in Edinburgh and how that does a disservice to my constituents and others throughout Scotland.

Looking at the performance of devolved powers, there are very few benchmarks where we can say we are doing better. In health, seven out of the eight targets set by the devolved Administration have not been met. NHS Tayside, which covers a large part of my constituency, is an absolute shambles. Education in Scotland used to be outstanding—a byword for world-class standards—but it is now ranked merely as average, as we fall down in maths, science and reading in international rankings. We want things to be devolved, but when areas are struggling and when Scotland's economic performance is a full percentage point below that of the rest of the United Kingdom, we need to look at what central Government can do to provide even more support, whether through additional funding or whatever else, to support our constituents.

No one should be forced to choose between being Scottish and British, or English and British, or Northern Irish and British, or Welsh and British. It is an identity that people can choose to adopt. It should not matter wherever someone is born—Scotland and the United Kingdom can be their home. We need to be very clear that devolution should not act as a wall but should be used to pass power right the way through the United Kingdom.

On the centralisation of power in Edinburgh, the Smith commission cross-party agreement, which included the Scottish National party, said that powers would pass from Westminster to Edinburgh to local councils and authorities. That has not happened. Powers have been taken from Westminster and are gathered jealously in Edinburgh, rather than being distributed to support our local councils and constituents.

It was not Scotland alone that won the world wars. It was not England in isolation that launched the NHS. We achieved those big programmes together. Looking forward, we can bring together and champion our 75,000 or 100,000 constituents, the 5.3 million Scots in Scotland and the 800,000 or so in England, and pull together as a total country of more than 65 million to face some of the huge challenges that the entire world faces. We are not better facing climate change alone or becoming smaller. We are not better facing international instability on our own or becoming smaller. We are better doing that together. Governments should support that. Devolution is not a wall. Westminster and every other level of government needs to deliver for our constituents.

3.6 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on setting the scene so very passionately. It is refreshing to have him and his colleagues in the House to add to our richness of political expression on all sides of the Chamber. It is good to have that. I am an Ulster Scot, with my ancestry in Scotland—I have checked it out and know that to be the case. I am descended from the Stewarts from the lowlands of Scotland. The name Shannon is not an Irish name; it is a derivative of the name Stewart, and I am very pleased to put that on the record.

I understand completely the point of view of the hon. Member for Stirling, and I am sure he will understand my comments within the framework of the current Northern Ireland situation. I am a Unionist, a Democratic Unionist and an Ulster Scot, and we are within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and we are better together, all regions and all of us—Scots, Welsh, Northern Irish and English.

As hon. Members have outlined, the framework for intergovernmental co-operation in its current form came from devolution in 1998. The UK Government have territorial Offices whose function it is to facilitate relations with the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive. The Cabinet Office is also responsible for intergovernmental discussions where matters arise between them. The parent forum for intergovernmental co-operation is the Joint Ministerial Committee, which consists of the respective Heads of Government in the United Kingdom and, where relevant, the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but other Ministers may attend in certain circumstances where the relevant areas of policy discussion require it.

As much as I respect and understand my friends and colleagues in this Chamber of all political aspirations and from other regions, the situation that we face in Northern Ireland is so very different, and is so very complex and serious, that I would not be doing my job as the MP for Strangford if I did not stand up and say

that we are in a crisis. It is past time that the Cabinet, the Joint Ministerial Council and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland began to take steps to take control of the non-administration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in Northern Ireland.

We are fast approaching the time when that will have to happen. We have school principals from every area of the country—in my constituency and across the whole of Northern Ireland—writing to us as MPs, literally begging someone to come and sort out the funding issue. We had additional money granted in the block grant, and additional money delivered to address issues in health and education, but for some reason we have permanent secretaries who feel unable to allocate additional funds as needed. We achieved the £1.4 billion financial agreement between the Conservative party and the Democratic Unionist party that delivers for everyone of all political aspirations in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the community—that money is for all. The greater good of the nation drove the deal that we made in June last year.

We are looking at country schools that service isolated communities and the cutting of their funding by a full teacher's salary, which to all intents and purposes closes the doors, while at the same time giving grants for schools that manage to save resources for the following years. Let us allow them to fund a teacher instead of giving grants for not using as much in resources. In my constituency we have teachers from small rural schools bag-packing in Tesco on Saturdays to attempt to raise money for their schools when they should have time off, as is their right. We need a Minister to direct a diversion of funding to staunch the bleeding of our education system and to carry out the surgery that is needed to direct the flow in the right direction. We need direction, which we are not getting from democratically elected Ministers.

My party is happy. There are no red lines preventing us going back into power, but it is clear that Sinn Féin are the obstacle to moving forward. It is time for us not to differ, but instead to look towards the things that we can agree on. That is where we should be. Whenever I talk to some of the Shinnars they tell me that they want education and a better health system, but at the same time they draw a red line on the Irish language and other issues that we have some problems with. Since we are rudderless and this place has the ability to step in and step up, that must be done.

I cannot speak for other areas, but this is the place to speak for my constituents in Strangford in Northern Ireland. For the day-to-day running of the country, I urge the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, the bodies that we have heard so much about today, to influence and even instruct permanent secretaries to do the right thing. Decisions must not be made by public outcry, but by reasoned and considered information exchange, and that is not happening in Northern Ireland. Let us use our intergovernmental ability to unfreeze Northern Ireland and make it into the place where we educate our children, fix all of the health issues that are so important and get the operations done. Let our young people get a place in their excellent local university and have job opportunities and a stable future. That was the case some years ago, but that has changed and our *modus operandi* must change too.

3.12 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): This debate is about the UK's machinery for the framework of intergovernmental co-operation. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) has approached it from a Scottish perspective and that much of the debate has centred on devolution. But the more I have listened to this debate the more I am convinced that it has implications for our future relationship with Europe. My reason for saying that comes from various perspectives. We have heard that this was about better ways of operating the union, but I think we also need to look at better ways of operating Europe. One of the ways in which we can do that is already in existence as an organisation of intergovernmental co-operation: the Council of Europe. I am pleased that all of the political parties represented in the Chamber have representatives on the Council of Europe. Not a single party here is not represented on the Council of Europe and the issue of devolution does not come up at all in the delegations. We act very well as a UK delegation.

The intergovernmental framework already exists and we already work together on a constructive basis. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling mentioned that it is better to work together, which is absolutely true. The Council of Europe works on the basis of consensus, not on the basis of legislative implications for the various countries there.

Mr Gregory Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is developing the thesis that he alluded to earlier. Does he agree with me that the vast majority of people outside the body politic would assess the progress or otherwise of intergovernmental conference working, whether it be on devolution or Europe, on how it affects them in their local society, how it affects their ability to get a job, and how it affects their schools and all the devolved issues? Those are the criteria by which we have to judge any success or otherwise. Does he agree that that is what the general public would adjudicate on?

John Howell: I agree that that is how the public would look at it. I think that we have been absolutely useless at telling the public what the Council of Europe does. It operates across almost every main Department of Government in the UK. It operates across the Home Office, with an emphasis on terrorism and security. It also operates across the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport through the recommendations we put forward on football governance, for example. We need to send out a message about what the Council of Europe does and how it operates. It does not dictate laws to countries. Even its conventions are for Governments to decide whether to sign up to, rather than ones that they are forced into. For all those reasons I think that there is a great purpose in the future of our relationship in Europe being based on the Council of Europe.

The Prime Minister said that we are leaving the European Union, but not leaving Europe. She went on to say:

"We should not think of our leaving the EU as marking an ending, as much as a new beginning for the United Kingdom and our relationship with our European allies."

I do not think that is a new beginning in itself. It is a beginning that can be founded in the Council of Europe. When we have that body in place, why on earth are we trying to reinvent the wheel and not using it for the purpose for which it was intended in 1949?

3.17 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this debate. He made a characteristically rumbustious speech that might be provocative in some quarters, but at no time can one accuse the hon. Gentleman of not engaging his grey cells, because there was a lot of new stuff and food for thought for us all in what he said.

First, I want to absolutely echo the remarks made physically on my right but politically on my left by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) about the fact that the Joint Ministerial Committee is a toothless tiger. It needs to beef up and be made real and I wholeheartedly endorse the comments that have been made. Secondly, no one knows better than a former Highland councillor or a representative of a Highland constituency just what has happened apropos the centralisation of powers in Edinburgh. The style of government that I see today is dramatically different, believe it or not, from that under Conservative Administrations long ago when there was more opportunity to do things differently and to negotiate with the Government and tailor-make solutions to suit the local area. Thirdly, the point made about Canada is absolutely apt. There is a mechanism there that we should look at because it works.

Some days ago I made a point in the Chamber about how 16 to 18-year-olds can buy knives in Scotland—carving knives or suchlike—and yet across the border in England they cannot. That seems to a lot of people I know, ordinary folk, to be dotty. The point was made to me by a colleague afterwards that knife crime is lower in Scotland. That is all very well, but it still means that someone can go and buy a knife across the border and come back, so that is hardly being a good neighbour. Many people have asked me what the point is in having drunk-driving laws on one side of the border that are different from those on the other. When I drive down to see my sister-in-law who lives in Northumberland, every time—not because I have a drink problem—I think to myself, "I am in England. I can have a pint now and I will not be pulled over and not be done for it."

On the other hand, this is not at all an anti-devolution speech—before I am accused of making one. I am proud of my 12 years in the Scottish Parliament. Some Members present for the debate attended an event today about the Scottish food and drink industry. The fact that the Scottish Government are looking at a different, tailor-made approach to the obesity problem is wholly laudable, and other regions of the UK can learn from that. That is what I call a proper exercise of devolution, but where there is a mismatch in fundamental laws embracing the entire UK, across borders, we should think carefully.

My second point—to repeat myself—is one that I made on Monday. In addition to the matter of the Joint Ministerial Committee, there is a breakdown between institutions—between Westminster and Holyrood. I said twice in interventions on Monday night that there should be some cross-party mechanism for Back-Bench MPs and MSPs to engage and converse, and to have a dialogue to understand the needs and issues that both institutions face. Let us face it, dialogue never hurts. Some sort of mechanism should be set up, and to that

end I wrote this week to Mr Speaker and to Mr Kenneth Macintosh, the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. I hope that they will look favourably on the idea of considering some such mechanism. As other hon. Members have asked, what do we gain from dispute between the institutions? Nothing. Who loses? The citizens—the good people of Scotland.

3.21 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson.

I have fond memories of happy days discussing constitutional machinery and frameworks for inter-governmental co-operation with people on the doorsteps of Edinburgh North and Leith in 2014. How engaged they all were with it. I love a bit of constitutional machinery, and the way it works so well when Governments co-operate for the greater good, as has been said. It is special—an aggregation that is greater than the sum of its parts. Each side benefits when Governments, sovereign in their own rights—none subservient to another and none in a position to overrule another unilaterally—benefit all the peoples of their nations by agreeing a way forward. That is a description of the EU, by the way, as has been mentioned. A supranational organisation with co-operation between nations delivers benefits for all that no nation could achieve on its own. They put aside their differences and any petty mistrust they may have, agree common rules and laws and tear down barriers. None has the right to impose on another and none can say “We will keep this power here,” or “You don’t know enough to do this yourself”.

That is the difference between confederal co-operation and controlled devolution; between sovereignty being pooled only with the consent of individual nations and power devolved being power retained; and between parity of esteem and patronising guff from a Parliament and Government that think they are above all else. That is the difference between the Canadian federal system of which the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) spoke so glowingly and the uneven, unfair devolved set-up that promises many rights but delivers few. I find it difficult to envisage the Canadian federal Government dictating laws to the Governments of the provinces in the way that the UK Government aggressively and contemptuously forced measures through last week.

Luke Graham: In using the Canadian example I think the hon. Lady misinterprets what my hon. Friend was saying. He was talking about a mechanism. The histories of our two countries are very different. I should hope that the hon. Lady would appreciate that. Canada was separate states that then came together in union. We are one unitary state with devolution taking a part. It is a completely different constitutional framework. I hope that the hon. Lady appreciates that.

Deidre Brock: I perfectly understand that, but I do not think I should have to accept it. It is an odd argument to make.

Of course, we could have had the debate in a forum where it matters—in debate on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. If only there were a Government with class and confidence in Whitehall, rather than a collection of desperate individuals who act with all the finesse of a tap dancing wildebeest. The sheer cowardice displayed in refusing to programme properly for debate

on devolved issues was as appalling as the contempt shown by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—of all offices—who made sure that he talked away any chance of a contribution from anyone else, before leaving the Chamber with a grin, and a spring in his step.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): As to the point made by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) about the different histories, I am unaware—perhaps the hon. Lady can enlighten me—but was not there a union of the two crowns, in the Acts of Union, between Scotland and England?

Deidre Brock: Yes, there was indeed. There was a union of the crowns in around 1605. [*Interruption.*] Forgive me—1603, indeed, under James VI.

Surely there can never have been a Government so tone deaf about such a crucial constitutional debate as the one who decided that what I have described was the way to handle things. When we think back through the list of Prime Ministers who have navigated their way through Parliaments in this building there are some numpties but there are few who would have made such a breathtaking mistake as to allow that contempt to show so openly, and even fewer who would not have been advised well by others around the Cabinet table of the danger into which they were putting themselves—the Government and the United Kingdom that they so preciously guard.

The current Prime Minister, one of the least able of all recent holders of the office—worse even than Gordon Brown—is poorly advised by her colleagues, ill advised by her staff and not advised by the Secretary of State for Scotland. He is posted missing—not quite absent but certainly not present. He is not engaged in Whitehall on Scotland’s behalf, but is busy in Scotland on Whitehall’s behalf.

Stephen Kerr: I hope the people of Scotland are watching, as the hon. Lady is personifying every aspect of nationalism that I described in my speech.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady continues, may I say that I want to bring in the Scottish National party spokesman at 28 minutes past, so that everyone on the Front Benches gets 10 minutes each?

Deidre Brock: Thank you, Mr Wilson. Yes, I am perfectly aware that the people of Scotland, or some of them, certainly, will be watching. I am not sure that I personify the kind of nationalism of which the hon. Member for Stirling constantly tries to portray the SNP as proponents. Of course I am an Australian, and half English. He might be advised to remember that.

If George Younger were Banquo the current Macbeth would wonder what he was on about. Younger’s boast that UK Government decisions on Scotland were made in Edinburgh, not London, would never pass the lips of the current Scotland Secretary. His constitutional machinery has broken down. He is not Scotland’s man in Whitehall, or even Whitehall’s man in Scotland. He is simply Whitehall’s voice in Scotland—a dunnerin brass. He is the propaganda man under whose tenure Scotland Office spin doctor spending has gone through the roof, reaching three quarters of a million pounds this year. On his watch advertising spending on social media has become

[*Deidre Brock*]

a Scotland Office priority, excluding people who have an interest in Scottish independence from a marketing campaign trying to suggest that Scotland needs the UK more than we need the EU, but including people with an interest in RAF Lossiemouth in a campaign about the budget. Then, of course, there was the online advertising campaign that was run entirely in his constituency.

The UK Government talk a lot about Scotland having two Governments, and about how they should work together, but there is a chasm between the suggestion that there is still a respect agenda and the reality, where a Secretary of State uses his office of state to attack Scotland's Government, denigrate the politicians who are trying to improve Scotland, and undermine the very fabric of devolution. We have seen a sustained and unrelenting attack on the choices that Scots have made—and on none more than the decision we made to stay in the EU. We have seen the disregard, disrespect and contempt in which the UK Government has held those choices.

Jamie Stone: May I direct the hon. Lady's attention to the second point that I made in my speech? Will she support my notion of a Back-Bench cross-party joint liaison committee between both institutions?

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. Before the hon. Lady continues, perhaps I can say that she is eating into the time of her party spokesman.

Deidre Brock: I would be perfectly happy to speak about the suggestion of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) on some future date.

Scotland's Parliament voted for the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill; Scots MPs wanted to debate the implications of the EU question for devolved Administrations; the Scots Government offered compromise and conversation, and at every step the UK Tory Government turned a sneering, contemptuous face away. The constitutional machinery and the frameworks for intergovernmental co-operation on these islands will work only if the political will is shown, if there is mutual respect, and if they are allowed to. They do not work, and that is the fault of Whitehall Ministers.

3.30 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I had hoped that more Members would be present today, but I realise that this feels a little like a break-out group from the main plenary in the Chamber of the House of Commons.

I have two preliminary points. First, the last time I replied to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) in a debate that he initiated in Westminster Hall, I said that I would not congratulate him because I felt that he was being extremely partisan in using this forum for debate to attack the Scottish National party. On this occasion, I welcome the fact that he has initiated this debate, and I congratulate him on the way that he conducted himself during the first half of his speech. There were moments when he perorated on constitutional

and democratic theory, and I would respect that in any debate in this Chamber. Unfortunately, he got ahead of himself. He could not really help himself, and he went into his usual rehearsed invective against my party, the Scottish Government and, I suppose by implication, the 40% of the Scottish electorate who support what we argue for. That was a bit of a shame. I feel that he let himself down at the end, but there we go—something is better than nothing.

My other preliminary point concerns what a number of Members have said about the events of last week, which they described as some sort of theatrical parliamentary stunt, or apparent walkout, by my party. That situation arose last Wednesday because of what had happened the day before, when we were given 19 minutes to discuss all the consequences of the Lords amendments to the Brexit Bill in the context of Scottish devolution, Welsh devolution, and the whole question of Ireland and the Irish border. Nineteen minutes—one minute for every year that devolution has existed. I think everyone will agree that that was woefully inadequate; I hope that even the Minister will agree with that. When the leader of my party tried to protest about that lack of—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking us away from the subject at hand. If he could concentrate on the motion before us that would be more than welcome.

Tommy Sheppard: I will take your guidance, Mr Wilson, but I am responding to the debate and those accusations were made. I want to put on the record that we attempted to protest about that lack of opportunity to represent our constituents, and I feel that a better Prime Minister would have acknowledged that and provided more time. Instead she was dismissive of the leader of my party, who then got into a row with the Speaker who expelled him from the House. I do not know what else we could have done at that juncture except walk out in solidarity.

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tommy Sheppard: I fear not. I suspect that the Chair does not want us to get into a discussion about the events of last Wednesday.

Let me turn to the motion before us. It is good that we are discussing this issue now, because it is topical and relevant. We are in the middle of a process that is all about relations between the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations of the United Kingdom. Government Members have suggested that when I use phrases such as “power grab”, not only am I over-egging the pudding, but I am completely misrepresenting the position. Apparently there is no power grab whatsoever; there is a powers bonanza with a huge list of powers being given to the Scottish Government—indeed, that list was read out in the Chamber last week. From the Labour Benches, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) says, “Actually, you are both wrong. It is neither a power grab nor a powers bonanza. Those are partisan arguments from two parties, one in government in Scotland, and one in government in the UK.”

I would like to test the arguments about a power grab. First, one must distinguish between responsibility for a particular area, and the power to execute and change

policy in that area. It is proposed that the Scottish Government should get a list of additional responsibilities after powers are repatriated from Brussels post-Brexit, but they will have much less authority and power than they currently have to do anything about those responsibilities. In 24 major areas—the most significant ones—the way that the Scottish Government discharge their responsibilities will be subject to a United Kingdom framework. We do not know the details of that framework because the discussion has not even got that far. So far in the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe, and other forums, there has been a discussion on the principles of how those arrangements might work, but it is the principles that are the problem.

Let me illustrate that by an example. Suppose after Brexit, we have a joint committee of the United Kingdom, involving the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations, to discuss agricultural policy. In that body, the interests of Scottish farmers would be represented by the Scottish Government or their appointees, and likewise for Wales and possibly Northern Ireland. The interests of English farmers would be represented by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—a Westminster Department. Why? Because there is no other body to do that for English farmers. There is no English Government or representative for English farmers.

I agree that English farmers need to be represented thoroughly in those discussions. The problem is that when there is a difference of opinion between the components of those arrangements, DEFRA will decide what happens. As well as advocating for the interests of one party, it will sit as judge and jury in deciding what happens for everyone else. That effectively means that this Parliament—Westminster—always gets to dictate what happens to the devolved Assemblies. There are two potential ways round that. One is to find another way of representing English farmers, such as by having an English Parliament or some other body, and the other is to allow DEFRA to continue to do that, but to have an independent arbiter as part of the arrangements that can arbitrate in disputes, supported by all parties and according to an agreed set of rules. That is exactly the proposition that the Scottish Government put forward in the JMC, but it was dismissed by the Westminster Government. We have therefore stalled the discussions about joint arrangements because there is no agreement in principle. We must return to the realisation that if we are to make this work, there must be a partnership between the component parts of the UK.

I do not accept for a minute that we need such joint arrangements to dictate uniform policy all the time, although there will be times when a case for that can be made. Sometimes, however, it is simply a matter of co-ordination. What does it matter if some things differ in different parts of the United Kingdom? Perhaps we can benefit if one Administration were to go further, while others might like to take see their time and see whether something works.

A smokescreen is being presented that claims that we cannot have the type of system I suggest because it would affect the United Kingdom's ability to undertake trade deals. I think that is nonsense. No one is arguing for executive authority over farms and fisheries in Scotland to frustrate a United Kingdom trade deal. Let me illustrate that, because at the moment there are differences.

Take liquor retail, for example, which I worked in before I became a Member of the House. At the moment there are completely different regulations north and south of the border. For example, the previous licensing Act prohibited the use of incentives to buy alcohol through discounting—we cannot have a three-for-two offer in Scotland.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman is bringing his remarks to a close because I want to bring in two other Front-Bench speakers and allow time for the mover of the motion to wind up the debate.

Tommy Sheppard: I am sorry, Mr Wilson. I thought I had 10 minutes, but I will bring my remarks to a close. At the moment, retailers and wholesalers in Scotland have different point of sale presentations, and different packaging on products. That is really not a problem—people are trying to make it one but it does not exist.

Finally, my beliefs have been caricatured and misrepresented in this debate. SNP Members have been called “nationalists” in the same sort of breath with which one might describe a pervert or somebody who has something wrong with them. Mine is a legitimate belief and not something that seeks to divide people—far from it. It is something that seeks to bring people together and allow them to exercise their democratic expression. What it boils down to is a belief that the people who live in Scotland should be the ones who control what happens in Scotland. We wish that power for the Scottish people in order to engage better with our neighbours. We seek not to put up fences but to break them down, and to have better arrangements for the whole island and the whole continent. In order to do that, people in Scotland must have the authority to make those deals and strike that mission for themselves.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Before I call the Labour Front-Bench speaker, let me say that I would like to bring in the Minister at 3.48 pm.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): On a point of order, Mr Wilson. I fear that we will be voting at that time.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): We could be. Fifteen minutes will be allowed for the vote, and then we will come back for the remainder of the sitting.

3.39 pm

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I compliment the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this debate. It is almost as though it was meant to take place this week, given recent events. However, I am mindful that it would have been unnecessary if the suggestions that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) made and the amendments that the Labour party tabled relating to the operation of the JMC and the Scotland Act 1998 were taken on board, but here we are.

We are discussing the constitutional machinery and frameworks for intergovernmental operation at a time when it has never been so evident that they are fundamentally broken. In particular, they are not working

[Lesley Laird]

well between the UK and Scottish Governments. Over the past few weeks, we have seen behaviour that people in Scotland find somewhat distasteful. Officers of government have not come forward when we have needed them to do so. The Secretary of State indicated that the UK is not a partnership, and that Scotland is just part of the United Kingdom—not helpful language, in the context of this debate—and the Scottish Parliament was overruled. I do not think anyone can disagree with that analysis of where we are. There is a general feeling that Scotland's voice is not being heard in the Brexit process. Again, I do not think anyone could disagree with that. We have witnessed walkouts and the Secretary of State going AWOL from the Dispatch Box. Many Members have been trying to foster dialogue, but the cancellation of two JMCs in recent weeks shows that is not happening.

Once again, I have come to the Chamber with some constructive proposals to improve the situation. The Joint Ministerial Committee is completely and utterly impotent. It can be called to meet only at the Government's behest. It did not meet for eight months—those were eight months of lost opportunity, in which work could have been done to avoid some of the issues we face today—and we have missed two meetings in the past few weeks. We do not have minutes of the meetings. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) talked about arbitration. If minutes were published, we would all have had the opportunity to contribute to that debate. Even when the meetings take place, they have no statutory underpinning, which is a fundamental flaw. I do not believe that, in this modern and open democracy, that is how we should conduct discussions between our Governments. It must change.

Labour offered a viable solution during the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill debates. We want the JMC to be put on a statutory footing, and we want it to produce a report and minutes. We want it to report to the Commons, and we want every single member and Government represented on the committee to be kept informed about and consulted on the UK's Brexit negotiations at every turn. However, that proposal was rejected by the Conservative Government, who appear to have absolutely no understanding of devolution or of the fact that the tactics they have been deploying are fuelling the frustrations that the hon. Member for Stirling referred to.

The amendments that my fellow Scot, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock, proposed to the withdrawal Bill would have established a council of Ministers—an advisory body bringing together Ministers from the devolved Administrations and the UK Government. That would have helped to ensure that the devolved Administrations and the advisory panel could make recommendations that the Government were required to take account of and make provisions to implement. It is important to make it clear that this is not about frustrating Brexit; it is about recognising that the current settlements are not working. On the back of Brexit, it is even more important that these mechanisms work clearly and effectively, and that legislators across our countries are co-ordinated.

On Monday, we heard about the desire of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) to see a parliamentary council made up

of Members of this place and of the Scottish Parliament. We should look at that proposal carefully, as we believe it could take the heat out of the argument we are currently involved in.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Order. There is a Division in the House, so we shall suspend for 15 minutes and come back for 4 o'clock. If there is more than one Division, the sitting will remain suspended for 15 minutes for each vote.

3.45 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.6 pm

On resuming—

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Let me just say that I did ask people to be back here for 4 o'clock; if there had been another vote, we could still have come back. We should have started at 4 o'clock. It is now six minutes past, and the next debate is being delayed. The only person who turned up for 4 o'clock was the Minister. Lesley Laird, would you like to continue your speech?

Lesley Laird: Thank you, Mr Wilson. Before the Division, I pointed out that the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross had highlighted a proposal during the week. I am asking that we all look at that proposal carefully. We believe that it could take the heat out of the argument in which we are currently involved. But what is vital is that any council of the type that we are discussing has some authority, because if it does not, we are back to square one, with the UK Government holding all the cards.

I have come to the conclusion that the UK and the Scottish Government have been approaching this all wrong. Rather than trying to rectify the root cause of the problem, they are trying to tackle the inevitable outcomes of a flawed system. That will happen again and again on the Trade Bill and on every single, and subsequent, piece of Brexit legislation, so today I would like simply to do one thing. I urge the Minister to get the UK and Scottish Governments around the table. The difference is that this time it is not to argue about the intricacies of one clause of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. Instead, we must look at the fundamental problems with our current constitutional arrangements and establish how we can improve them for the benefit of the people we are here to serve.

We believe that the talks could form a memorandum of understanding between the Governments about where we go from here and how we address the real concerns that have arisen about devolution in the UK. Then, and only then, should we start trying to deal with the minutiae. It is time to break the stand-off and come to an arrangement that will work for all partners of the United Kingdom in the long term. The Labour party stands committed, as it has always done, to facilitating and engaging in the talks. I sincerely hope that the Minister and the UK Government can give us the requested assurances today.

Phil Wilson (in the Chair): Minister, before you start, I point out that this debate has to finish by 4.21 pm. If you could leave a couple of minutes for the mover of the motion, that would be great.

4.9 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson.

I sincerely thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for requesting the debate, and I shall of course be sure to leave him time to respond to what has been said. He has prompted a rich exchange on intergovernmental relations, and I thank him for doing so. I am also grateful to other hon. Members for all the contributions that have been made.

This is, after all, a timely debate, considering various recent events, but I shall preface my remarks on the subject by thinking about the principles that we operate on in our constitution, such as it is. We do not have a codified constitution such as Canada's, to provide a model for other countries around the world to use. Instead, we have the product of organic history, as my hon. Friend said. We have a flexible approach that allows us to respond as circumstances demand and, crucially, to reflect the different ways in which we have, across the four nations of the United Kingdom, reached today's point.

I was conscious of the remarks with which my hon. Friend began. He said that we ought not to aim for artificial uniformity, and that we should not ignore either the history of how we got here or the present-day realities. That was a very helpful reminder of the principles that we might use to approach today's debate. How do we keep the structures that we have fit for the future? That is the question on which I wish to offer some thoughts to the Chamber.

Our exit from the European Union of course prompts a range of extremely challenging considerations. We need to ensure that our statute book continues to function, to examine those areas of policy in which EU law has created consistent UK-wide practices to date, and to ensure that our intergovernmental ways of working continue to be fit for purpose. Crucially, as the Prime Minister has made clear, we need to safeguard the integrity of our precious Union—I, too, am a strong believer in that.

It is imperative, as the UK leaves the EU, that all the Administrations of the UK benefit from a unified approach. That is only possible through the strength of our relationships and our joint working. The Joint Ministerial Committee structure that has been discussed today provides that but, while it has served us well, it is still evolving. That is important, and there is a very current example of that.

Recently, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), and I chaired an additional forum with the devolved Administrations under that structure—that was only on 24 May—and we look forward to the next one soon. In itself, that is an example of the flexibility in our constitutional arrangements that let us convene that group fast and effectively.

We have found ourselves in times that our colleagues in the devolved Administrations agree are not normal, but the Government are absolutely committed to working closely with those Administrations to ensure full engagement and collaboration across the breadth of what we need to do to leave the EU. That was very obvious during the months that were spent working with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and Northern Ireland civil servants

on revised proposals for the EU withdrawal Bill, which the Welsh Government have confirmed safeguard devolution and the future of a successful United Kingdom.

The ways in which we work with the devolved Administrations are supported by departmental structures inside the UK Government. For example, as part of my own Department, there is a thing called the UK governance group, which brings together the whole of the UK Government's work on constitutional and devolution issues under the oversight of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. It brings together the Cabinet Office's constitutional work, the Scotland and Wales Offices, and the office of the Advocate General, and it works closely with the Northern Ireland Office. We can therefore conduct that work to strengthen and maintain the Union across all Departments as a shared responsibility. That is very important, allowing us to have detailed expertise and, crucially, to hear the voice of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland at the very highest levels of Government through the Secretaries of State who relate to those Offices.

As well as getting on with our immediate business—not least leaving the EU—and considering the structures that facilitate that, we must also look to the future. As hon. Members will know, our departure from the EU will result in a significant increase in the decision-making powers and responsibilities of the devolved Administrations. New responsibilities will go to Edinburgh, Cardiff and—once a new Executive is formed—Belfast. In some of those areas, the UK Government and the devolved Administrations will continue to work closely in frameworks across the whole of the UK. That will be done through principles that have been agreed through all the devolved Administrations.

As we set up those arrangements, one thing is clear: the success of each of them surely will rely on the strength of our relationships and of the partnerships and collaboration that have been a theme of the debate. It is so important that we work together to put arrangements in place that stand the test of time. We must seek to achieve that in order to provide certainty for people and businesses living and operating in the UK and the flexibility to adapt should that be needed.

Hon. Members considered during the debate how we can improve existing intergovernmental structures. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling in particular for laying out his vision, but I also note the suggestions by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) about the Council of Europe. Let me also take a moment to thank the Select Committees of both Houses and of the devolved legislatures, as well as academics, for their suggestions about this subject. This is, as I said, a rich and timely debate.

The UK Government recognise the need to ensure that our structures are adaptable and fit for the future. The Prime Minister led a discussion about this very issue at the plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee in March, at which Ministers agreed to review existing intergovernmental structures and the memorandum of understanding. That review rightly provides us with an opportunity to look carefully at the current ways of working between the different Administrations. It means we can learn from the existing arrangements that work well, listen to the ideas that have been put forward today, and improve less effective structures as we put our future frameworks in place.

[Chloe Smith]

We have to ensure that intergovernmental structures and agreements remain adaptable enough to address the interests of the four Governments and their people at any given time. As we do so, we should continue to reflect on our unique circumstances—the different settlements and the constitutional history that led us to this place. The UK is not Canada, after all—close friends though we are. We can certainly learn from other countries, but it is important that we get this right.

4.16 pm

Stephen Kerr: I thank the Minister for her remarks, and all the Members who participated in the debate. It was lively and robust, as one would have anticipated, but there was also a huge degree of agreement that we need to work together to improve the processes by which our country works. Only when all parts of the United Kingdom, all levels of government and all the Parliaments and Assemblies work together will we be able to achieve the great things we all hope for for our country. Ultimately, that is tied up with the prosperity and wellbeing of our people. They sent us here to do that, and we must set our minds to that task.

I look forward to further engagement and discussion with Members across the House about these ideas and proposals. I hope that we can come together to reach an outcome that stands the test of time, as the Minister described. I agree with her that there have been many helpful contributions to the debate about this issue, principally by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which has done some fabulous work. We need to build on all that to secure the future of the United Kingdom and an ever strengthened and better Union.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK constitutional machinery and frameworks for intergovernmental co-operation.

UK and Polish War Reparations

4.19 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK and Polish war reparations from Germany.

Last year, I visited Warsaw to receive an award on behalf of my family for the brother of my grandfather Jan Kawczynski. He was acutely aware that in Poland there was the death penalty for hiding Jewish friends and neighbours. Nevertheless, he took the risk and hid many of his Jewish friends and neighbours on his estate. As a result of doing that, the Germans killed him and his entire family. When he returned to his estate, the Germans instructed him to take off his officer's boots. They made him watch as they shot his 12-year-old daughter in front of him. Then, they shot his wife. Jan Kawczynski was my age at the time he was shot by the Germans. His 12-year-old daughter who was shot in front of him was almost the same age as my daughter Alexis.

It was a very moving moment for me and the Kawczynskis to pick up this award for him and his family. It brought back to me the emotional issue of just how much Poland suffered during the second world war at the hands of the German invaders. The attitude of the Germans to war reparations can be summed up very eloquently in three Polish words that were sent to me by my friends in the Polish Parliament: *przemilczenie*, *przedawnienie* and *zapomnienie*. That basically means that they want to silence the debate. They want to show that the debate is outdated and from a bygone era that is no longer relevant to today. They want to forget it.

There has been no resolution to this issue; no formal treaty has been signed between Germany and Poland since the second world war. Bearing in mind the huge loss of life, the buildings that were destroyed and the works of art that were stolen from Poland, this issue simply will not go away. I pay tribute to our friends in the Polish Parliament, in particular my friend Arkadiusz Mularczyk, who has been tasked by the Polish Government with compiling a major dossier to look at the practicality of Poland being able to take Germany to a tribunal to seek war reparations. Of course, the Minister will know that article 3 of the Hague convention of 1907, a copy of which I have before me, clearly states the responsibility of an aggressor nation such as Germany in ensuring that there is proper compensation for all aspects of an invasion of this kind.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to the Chamber. If there are going to be any reparations, which quite clearly the hon. Gentleman requests and which I support, let us start with an apology to Polish people from Germany for its actions. Has that ever been done?

Daniel Kawczynski: I did not quite hear everything the hon. Gentleman said.

Jim Shannon: Was there an apology from the Germany to the Polish people for its actions during the second world war? If there are to be any reparations, that starts with an apology from the German nation to the Polish nation.

Daniel Kawczynski: That is a very good point and I do not believe there has actually been a formal apology to the Polish nation and people. Germany has not publicly stated to Poland the importance of apologising for what happened and of granting compensation. I have spoken to many Germans this week. They say, "Look, this is an issue that we have already dealt with. We reached an agreement with the Polish Government." I say, "Which Polish Government?" They say, "The Polish communist Government." They claimed that they reached an agreement with the Polish communist Governments in 1970 and thereafter. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman will know, those Polish Governments were completely illegitimate. Poland, trapped behind the iron curtain as a result of the Yalta agreement, had no legitimate Government.

Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): Is it not a matter of historical fact that the Soviet Union leaned on its puppet Polish Government to stop any reparations? That is the basis of what stands now, and that cannot be right.

Daniel Kawczynski: Absolutely. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for that. The Soviet Union wanted some form of peace in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Soviet bloc—bear in the mind the importance of getting along with East Germany—so Poland was forced by the Soviet Union to keep quiet and not ask for any compensation. These Communist dictators, whose names are indelibly imprinted on my mind—Bierut, Gomulka, Gierek, Kania and Jaruzelski—were Soviet puppets, imposed on us, who had no right to sign any documentation. Anything signed with the Germans is non-valid and illegal.

The only thing I consider to be valid is the agreement of 1990, where a free Poland, alongside Britain, France and the Soviet Union, signed an agreement with the new Germany—Germany was being reunified—guaranteeing Polish western borders. Exchange of territory in that treaty, whether former east Prussia or Silesia—all those lands—is legitimate. All the previous agreements simply do not hold water because of the illegality of the communist regime.

The Minister will have to correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding from the Library and other sources is that the Germans have paid a total of €75 billion in compensation to other countries for war damage. I find that figure breathtakingly small. When we bear in mind that we are being told to stump up €40 billion for having the temerity to leave the European Union, it is amazing that the Germans have paid only €75 billion for the complete destruction of our continent and the murder of millions of people. Apparently, only 2% of that €75 billion has so far trickled down to Poland. The country worst affected by the second world war has received less than €1 billion in compensation.

I will send the Minister a letter on all the different agreements reached between Germany and other affected countries on the continent of Europe. There are extensive treaties and agreements with the Czech Republic, France, Belgium and many others—even Sweden, bizarrely, which I do not think was a participant in the war. All those countries have received compensation—apart from the country most affected. Of course, Israel and others have received compensation.

I want to read out some of the horrifying statistics, which are indelibly imprinted on my mind. I thank my Polish teacher, Mrs Wątrobska, for helping me to translate some of this information. Six million Poles were slaughtered during the second world war by the German invaders, and—hon. Members should remember this—for every 1,000 citizens, Poland lost 220; a fifth. Think about that for a moment. Out of a thousand people in a community, wherever you go, 220 are killed. By comparison, the United Kingdom lost eight, Belgium 7, Holland 22 and France 15. Poland lost 220 of every thousand citizens.

More than 200,000 children—the ones who looked Germanic—were kidnapped by the Germans and taken to Germany for the process of Germanisation. Some 590,000 people were left forever disabled. More than 1 million people fell ill as a result of tuberculosis, and many of them died, because so many people were kept in such horrific conditions, particularly in forced labour camps. Just under 2.5 million people were exploited in labour camps, and a further 2.5 million were displaced. In 1939 alone, 38% of all Poland's wealth was stolen.

The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) is present, and he represents one of our cities that was worst affected by Luftwaffe bombing. In Warsaw, the city of my birth, 90% of factories, 72% of buildings and 90% of the cultural heritage were destroyed and 700,000 people were killed. Of the country's cultural heritage as a whole, 43% was destroyed or stolen in 1939. I am in discussions with Sotheby's and many other important British auction houses to try to track down the huge amount of Polish art and literature that was stolen and taken away by the Germans as they plundered Poland and then escaped.

My Polish teacher, Mrs Wątrobska, gave me another point. During the war, a large number of people were experimented on. No one mentions the children who suffered those experiments and who forever remain mentally ill or physically disfigured.

A senior Conservative MP—I will not say who—said to me, "Do not raise this issue now, old boy, we do not want to upset the Germans when we are negotiating Brexit." Needless to say, I have ignored his advice, because a time of major change on the European continent, as we pull out of the European Union and regain our sovereignty, independence and foreign policy, is exactly the time to raise the issue and to help our Polish allies to get the compensation that they deserve.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is a timely debate. Quite frankly, these issues should have been raised many years ago, and that is not the hon. Gentleman's fault. We owe it to the Polish people to do what we can to get back some of the treasures that he has described. Coventry was badly bombed, so people there understand. I am sure that he knows we have a fair-sized Polish contingent in Coventry who would be very interested in the debate.

Daniel Kawczynski: We have had huge support. Let us not forget that there are now 1 million Poles living in our country. Poland is the second-most spoken language on our island after English. I am very proud of the contribution that those 1 million Poles make to our country. As I tour the United Kingdom and meet Polish organisations, they repeatedly raise this issue with me. It is such an issue of honour for them and their families.

[*Daniel Kawczynski*]

What message would it send if we chose to forget the suffering of those who were killed or tortured during the second world war?

The proudest moment of my parliamentary career was going to the RAF club with Lord Tebbit. In front of an Anglo-Polish dinner, he said something that will resonate with me for ever—of course, I have told my daughter about it and I will tell as many children as I can. He said that the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force were so evenly matched in 1940 that the arrival of the Polish pilots that summer tipped the balance in our favour. Lord Tebbit and others say that we may well have lost the battle of Britain if it had not been for those Polish pilots. Of course it is possible to replace planes relatively quickly, but it takes a long time to train up pilots, and it was the bravery of those pilots—those Polish pilots—that secured freedom for us.

Let us not forget that the Polish 303 Squadron got the highest number of kills during the battle of Britain and was the single largest foreign contingent in the RAF. Let us not forget that General Anders brought the Polish Free Army out of Poland, through the Soviet Union and Iran, to meet up with the British 8th Army. The Poles trained in Palestine; they joined the British 8th Army; they fought at El Alamein and at Tobruk; they went through the whole of north Africa; and as the hon. Member for Coventry South will remember, they took Monte Cassino. The most difficult part of the Gustav line was won and secured by those brave Poles at Monte Cassino. And let us not forget that the Poles were there at the Arnhem landings.

Let us also not forget, however, what happened when we secured victory in 1945. Guess who was prevented from joining us in the victory parade—the Poles. After everything that they had contributed during the second world war to help us, the Poles were banned by the Government at the time from joining the victory parade, for fear of upsetting Stalin.

We have a duty, a blood duty, a duty of honour to the Poles to ensure that we use our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a major European power to make sure that we help Poland to get this compensation.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman has covered the point I was going to make, which was about Monte Cassino, where the Poles suffered terrible casualties. He has already covered that point, so I am just reinforcing what he has said.

Daniel Kawczynski: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention.

Mr Lord: I think that Members here in Westminster Hall would be interested to know the current Polish Government's attitude and policy with regard to this very important but obviously difficult issue.

Daniel Kawczynski: I will come on to that right at the end of my speech, if I may, to sum up.

Let me quickly turn now to British war reparations, because this debate, of course, is about Polish and British war reparations. We have in Westminster Hall the hon. Member for Coventry South, whose city was more affected than any other in the bombing that Britain experienced during the second world war.

In March, I asked the Minister what the British Government's position is on our claims to war reparations, bearing in mind that the United Kingdom was completely bankrupt at the end of the second world war. We had had to borrow money to fight the war; many British cities had been destroyed; and many British lives had been lost in liberating half the continent of Europe. The answer came back that we had renounced all claims to compensation in 1990, upon the reunification of Germany. I want to know why we renounced our claims in 1990. I can understand why we would want to celebrate and wish the two countries—East Germany and West Germany—every success in coming together, but I want to know why, and how, that decision on British reparations was taken.

I then subsequently asked what consultations there had been with veterans—British war veterans—in making the decision to abandon all war reparations claims. The answer came back as follows:

“Records on this are not readily available. To find this information would incur disproportionate cost.”

Well, I am in discussions with veterans' organisations and we have put together a team of leading British barristers who are willing, on a pro bono basis, to test this matter through the British courts. I very much hope that those veterans who are listening to or watching this debate on television around the United Kingdom will take note and get in touch with my office, to see if they would like to be part of this attempt to take Germany to court, through our own High Court, to receive compensation.

There is a huge battle ahead for us—for the United Kingdom—as we pull out of the European Union. Poland will have to decide whether she wants to join us and the United States of America in an Atlanticist organisation based on sovereign nation states co-operating on defence and working collaboratively to protect one another through NATO, thereby retaining her sovereignty, currency and independence, or whether she will go along with Germany's project for a single European superstate, with a single currency, a single European army, a single foreign policy and the rest of it. If Germany is serious in trying to convince Poland to back her in her quest to create a genuine European Union, this issue has to be resolved. Otherwise, I believe Poland will increasingly side with the United Kingdom and America in an alternative alliance.

This has been the most emotional debate I have ever participated in. Bearing in mind how my own family were shot and imprisoned, how our estates were burned to the ground and how all those working for the Kawczynskis were murdered, I will not rest until this issue is resolved.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I remind Members that the debate is entitled to run until 4.51 pm.

4.40 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): The issue of reparations was considered in detail at the Paris reparations conference of 1945. The final act of the conference, which came into force on 24 January 1946, set out the international agreement that had been reached. In 1953, Poland's then communist Government recognised that Germany had fulfilled its financial obligations with regard to Poland and decided against seeking compensation.

In 1990, the treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany was signed by West Germany, East Germany, the US, the UK, the Soviet Union and France. It allowed the recently reunited Germany to have full sovereignty over its internal and external affairs. The Government considers that that treaty definitively settled between the parties matters arising out of the second world war. The treaty was laid before the House for clearance under the Ponsonby rule. The Government have no plans to reopen any claim for reparations from Germany in respect of losses sustained during world war two, including for damage caused to UK cities.

In Poland, the issue of financial reparations from Germany came to the fore in July 2017, when it was raised by the PiS Law and Justice party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, and again in September 2017 when it was raised by the then Polish Prime Minister, Beata Szydło. She argued, as we have heard this afternoon, that decisions made by the Polish communist authorities were subject to pressure from the Soviet Union and were therefore not necessarily valid.

In August and September 2017, the German Bundestag and Polish Parliament analysed the matter and, in separate reports, came to opposite conclusions. The German report concluded that decisions made by the communist regime were fully valid, and that Poland officially relinquished its claims in 1953. The Polish report, on the other hand, concluded that Poland's right to reparations had not expired under international law, and that Poland had an ongoing right to claim reparations from Germany.

When Polish Foreign Minister Czaputowicz visited Berlin in 2018, he and the then German Foreign Minister Gabriel agreed to set up a joint Polish-German commission on the issue. It is not yet clear whether that proposal has been agreed by the current German Government, and if it has, when such a commission might be created. Clearly, this is a matter for Poland and Germany to decide.

The Government consider the issue of German reparations to have been settled by the treaty on the final settlement in 1990. We believe that there are risks in the Polish Government's reopening the issue with Germany, as we have made clear to the Polish Government. However, the question of whether they choose to take the issue forward and how it is resolved is clearly a matter for Poland and Germany to decide. For our part, the UK believes that we must never forget the lessons of history, but nor should we dwell on the past.

Question put and agreed to.

Insecure Work and the Gig Economy

4.45 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered insecure work and the gig economy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I declare an interest as a proud member and former officer of the trade union GMB. I thank GMB for its support, and I refer hon. Members to the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Today's debate is predicated on one simple issue: work in the UK is becoming increasingly insecure. A changing economy over the past decade has led to a boom in new jobs, which have combined to create a worrying picture of employment rights across our economy. Often under the pretence of offering flexibility, employers have exploited working practices to maximise profit at the expense of workers. The experience of being trapped in a low-paid job with no guaranteed hours, wages or security of employment, and of being unable to plan past this week's rota or pay cheque, with fewer rights and lower pay than colleagues, is all too familiar for people across the country.

It is notoriously difficult to measure insecure work, which is in itself part of the problem, but some estimates put the number of people trapped in insecure employment well into the millions. The number of people in zero-hours or agency contracts alone is near the 1 million mark, while nearly 3 million people are underemployed and left seeking more hours than they secure week after week.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. We had an instance in Coventry a few years ago with a company called City Link. At Christmas, about 1,000 van drivers were laid off; those drivers rented their vans, and were left high and dry and could not get any redundancy money—so this is a timely debate. I hope that she will touch on the Taylor review, which I think did not go far enough. It could be called a whitewash, quite frankly.

Stephanie Peacock: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; I will indeed talk about that. He is right that the problem is not confined to small sections of our economy, but spread throughout. From tourism to retail, hospitality and our public services, the economy is dependent on these jobs. It goes far beyond genuine short-term work, such as meeting seasonal demand over the Christmas rush in retail, or the busy summer period at a caravan park. The balance of power is woefully skewed in favour of employers who use short-term contracts to minimise their responsibilities and maximise their profits at the expense of job security for their employees.

Areas such as my own in Barnsley are disproportionately affected. Former industrial towns and coalfield areas are disadvantaged communities that have been left behind by the economy and are taken advantage of. Where average wages lag far behind national levels, unemployment is higher and social mobility is appallingly low. Unscrupulous companies can offer insecure, low-paid work where the alternative is often nothing. In Barnsley, the switch to gig employment and short-term work in

[Stephanie Peacock]

areas such as distribution in warehouses and our public sector means that too many people in my constituency simply cannot be certain that their job will last longer than the next rota. No matter how hard they work, their precarious employment leaves them with no chance to save up or plan for the future.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful case. Does she agree that a characteristic of the gig economy is that on the one hand companies make enormous profits, while on the other workforces live in permanent insecurity, with all that means for their living standards and their family life? Will she join me in congratulating the GMB for the landmark challenges it has mounted—in particular, to the grotesque abuses characterised by Uber?

Stephanie Peacock: I totally agree, and I join my hon. Friend in congratulating GMB. He is right: many employees are forced into debt and are unable to pay their bills or buy food, and others are forced to work through physical or mental illness out of fear of losing what employment they have.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I have heard from members of our trade union, GMB, who work in warehouses in Yorkshire on relentless shift patterns, which means that they never actually get a weekend. Inevitably, that has an impact on their mental health. Does she agree that we cannot improve people's mental health without improving their working standards?

Stephanie Peacock: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I believe she is referring to research from the GMB trade union, which shows that, across the country, 61% of insecure workers have gone to work while feeling unwell for fear of losing pay, hours or even their job. The same percentage have suffered mental health issues. For their troubles, they are often first out of the door when times are hard, and are cast into a welfare state that is not fit to help them.

It is not just workers who suffer. Companies' widespread avoidance of the minimum wage, holiday pay and sick leave is estimated to cost the public purse £300 million a year in lost national insurance contributions. Such practices undermine the many employers who play by the rules, the companies that invest in their workers' skills and training, the family-run businesses that pay their staff a decent wage, and the employers who pay their taxes and make pension contributions. In one way or another, we are all footing the bill for the businesses that take advantage of precarious work. Action is long overdue.

It is a little over a year to the day since the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street after the election and noted that people who have a job do not always have job security. Sadly, the Government have kicked the Taylor review's recommendations into the long grass, and have failed to take action on areas such as the Swedish derogation, which I sought to address with my private Member's Bill. Will the Minister commit to take action to ensure more and better workplace inspections to ensure that the scant, bare-minimum

protections that workers are currently afforded are actually enforced, and that swift action is taken against abusive employers?

On companies that make profits off the backs of agency workers, will the Minister ensure that, from day one, agency workers are afforded the same rights and pay as permanent staff doing the same roles in the same company? That is another issue that I sought to address in my private Member's Bill. Cases brought against Uber and Pimlico Plumbers show that such workers are employees; they are not self-employed or independent contractors, as claimed. In view of such cases, will the Government act now, rather than wait for every single worker to undertake judicial proceedings against their employer? Those are not just legal judgments against individual employers, but damning indictments of employers in the gig economy as a whole.

I have heard from an Amazon worker who has seen women colleagues tragically miscarry in a warehouse, and fights break out on the packing floor because the competition for work is so high. I have heard the heartbreaking story of a careworker whose employers forced her to provide a urine sample to prove she was too sick to work. Another careworker's agency refused to give her work as soon as it found out she was pregnant. I have heard from a Hermes worker who gets only one day off a year to spend with his family, which has a damaging effect not just on him but on his wife and children.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning organisations that engage in such practices? One of my constituents ended up with hypothermia after waiting for Deliveroo work. When he was admitted to hospital, he was not offered the sick pay and protection that other employees get. The Government must take action now because although GMB and other unions are doing fantastic work we cannot rely just on unions. We need to ensure that the Government support our unions.

Stephanie Peacock: I join my hon. Friend in condemning that. I am sure the Minister is listening carefully.

Those workers are the real face of the gig economy. It is simply not good enough. We urgently need an economy that works for everyone. We need well-paid jobs that offer long-term security and give people the chance not just to get by but to succeed and prosper. We need genuine action that addresses the employment loopholes that unscrupulous employers use to exploit vulnerable workers. Many people in Barnsley and across the UK need action now.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): We have 12 Members who want to speak, so I have to impose a time limit of three minutes. You have to stick to that.

4.55 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I will follow your guidance, Mr McCabe, although I am the only Back-Bench Member represented on the Government Benches. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) for securing this important debate.

The 21st century has brought us the advent of digital technologies, which have been transformational to working environments, creating opportunity and flexibility with

remote working and online networking. Unfortunately, there are cases where flexible working models have led to poor management practices and a degradation of employment rights.

Although flexible work has advantages for employers and employees, in some instances insecure work does not provide a fair balance for employees. I have experienced that in my family. A cousin of mine is on a zero-hours contract. He took a shift with a well-known retailer, but on arrival was told he was only needed for two hours, leaving him with a day's wages that barely covered the bus fare to and from work. That is not uncommon, and it can be worse: people can turn up for work and find that there is no work for them. There is no excuse for that; it is just bad management practice. Employers can plan how many people they need before somebody turns up for work. Those situations can sometimes be facilitated by working arrangements in the gig economy, but that is not the case for most workers.

A study carried out by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy identified that the most common use for this type of employment was to supplement income streams, with approximately two thirds of those who took part in the study earning less than 5% of their income with gig work. It was basically topping up income. Even in today's world, it is normally women who take time off to care for loved ones, and the gig economy can provide a great way for women to continue to work while balancing their responsibilities. I am sure we all have many examples of that. I have one in my constituency. Through an online platform, a constituent does administrative jobs for 20 hours a week while her son is at preschool or when he is watching the football with her husband. I guess we are hoping that she will be earning a bit more as England continue in the World cup.

The use of flexible work to bolster household income is increasingly common. Some people choose that way of working permanently. Technology has enabled capabilities to take off as the world gets smaller, in terms of connectivity. One of my constituents, a recent graduate, currently works as a freelance online comms manager. He runs social media accounts from home, servicing the needs of companies. The work is insecure, because it is not contracted, but he values the flexibility. He is not alone; some 90% of those who are wholly reliant on gig income said that they were satisfied. Of course, we need to listen to the concerns of the 10%, some of which have been expressed here today.

The gig economy can empower people to live in a way that increases choice, allowing them to balance their commitments. That will become increasingly important as we all work for longer and will require greater flexibility in how we manage our careers.

4.58 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this important debate and the powerful way in which she introduced the subject.

The world of work is evolving rapidly. The plethora of court cases and the growing uncertainty are a reflection not only of how technology is changing the employment relationship, but of how new and unscrupulous employers are seeing that as an opportunity to loosen the relationship further, usually to the detriment of the worker.

I, too, pay tribute to the GMB, which has pushed back against this wild west frontier approach, but it should not just be down to trade unions to try to make the best of 20th-century laws in the 21st century. Parliament should be setting out a new, comprehensive settlement to take us into the new world. We should do it in a way that ensures dignity, certainty and fairness for those who work in the gig economy. That is why it is completely unacceptable that, weak though it is, there has been no progress on the Taylor review a year after it reported.

I am talking about the 21st century, and I have to say that I was rather amused and disappointed by the comments made by the founder of Pimlico Plumbers.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The important thing is that we are now creating a new animal in our economy: the working poor. That is what people tend to miss, and it is happening as a result of the gig economy. We had an incident in Coventry a fortnight ago on a Saturday night between black cab drivers and Uber drivers, and it ended in a certain amount of violence. Surely, things cannot go on like this.

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Whole ways of working are being disrupted in ways that really are undermining the economy. I go back to the Pimlico Plumbers judgment, which found that someone who had worked for the company for six years was entitled to some basic workplace employment rights. The founder of Pimlico Plumbers said:

"We had five judges in the top court in the country and an opportunity to bring our employment law into the 21st century and unfortunately they missed the point."

I have to say that he has rather missed the point, if he thinks that in the 21st century it is acceptable for someone to work at the same company for six years and not be entitled to any basic workplace protections. That sounds like something out of the 19th century, not the 21st.

I had rather more sympathy with him when he said:

"We can't get our heads around this word 'worker' and what it means."

I am sympathetic to that, because the truth is that the worker category has always been an unsatisfactory halfway house between employed and self-employed. If we leave aside the question of agency workers, there should be no halfway house—a person is either employed by someone or not. If we can offer a bold and clear legislative framework, with the presumption of employment if someone is carrying out the work personally, we can end the uncertainty and hopefully begin to end the exploitation that we see in the sector.

Those who advocate these new relationships often present them as providing a choice to those who work under them, but it is an utterly false choice. It is a choice that is no choice at all. A choice is ordering food from a menu or choosing to have gammon and deciding whether to have egg or pineapple with it. The choice here is whether someone accepts what is served up or does not eat at all. That is not a real choice. It is a business model and a culture that says people are as disposable as coffee cups. It says, "If we don't have enough work, tough. If you fall ill, tough." And, crucially, it says, "If you question our methods or challenge any of our payments, you should not expect to get any more work from us in the future."

[Justin Madders]

Without job security, people have no security. How can they plan for the future, look to buy a house, have a family, save for retirement or maybe even start their own business if the labour market is so cutthroat, insecure and parasitic that it takes everything that they have got just to keep their head above the water? I think we can do better than that. We need to enter a new world where people are valued as much as the product that they are producing. At the moment, we are in a world where exploitation is all. It has to come to an end.

5.1 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this debate and on her private Member's Bill, of which I am a sponsor. I also want to take the opportunity to commend the work of Better Than Zero, an organisation primarily organised through the Scottish Trades Union Congress youth committee, which continues to expose rogue employers in Scotland.

Mr McCabe, you and I sit on the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. You will know that there are 4,504 full-time equivalent posts chasing social security fraud estimated at £1.2 billion. There are 400 workers from the state who are employed to chase minimum wage compliance. If the minimum wage compliance unit had 4,504 full-time equivalent posts, I just wonder whether there would be 200,000 workers in the United Kingdom not being paid the national minimum wage.

Another piece of legislation, in addition to the hon. Lady's, is the Workers (Definitions and Rights) Bill. It is in my name, and it proposes a number of key things as solutions for workers in the gig economy. First, it looks at zero-hour contracts. I think they should only be in place where there is a collective agreement with a recognised trade union. That will be the test of whether the claim that people like zero-hour contracts is actually true or not. Mainly people tell us that people like zero-hour contracts, but I have never met anyone who went to a careers adviser at school and said, "I want wan o yon zero-hour contracts." It just does not happen.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Has the hon. Gentleman considered alternative contracts such as they have in other countries? In Holland, for instance, they have contracts by agreement, which are fixed-term agreements paid by the hour with a legal route to permanent contracts. Is that something that he would consider in his legislation?

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. Just before the hon. Gentleman replies, I would point out that if people keep taking interventions, some people are going to drop off the end.

Chris Stephens: I am not opposed to what the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) suggests.

I want to deal with the important issue of shift changes. Some of us in the Chamber attended a TUC event earlier this year. It is clear that two things are happening: sometimes shifts are cancelled, which means that people miss out and have to pay for childcare, and sometimes people are told they have to work additional

hours. There is a real case for saying that if people turn up at work and are told that they have to work additional hours or that their shift is cancelled, they should be paid double time so that they are compensated for childcare.

We must also look at worker status. I have a very real concern about the Taylor review trying to introduce additional tiers of worker. There should be a single definition of a worker. It is clear that if someone provides their labour to an employer, they are a worker—full stop. Self-employment is also easily defined. It seems clear to me that a window cleaner with 200 customers is self-employed. We really need to address the issue with worker status to help the many people who are told that they are self-employed when, in actual fact, that is bogus.

I want to touch finally on an issue that we have seen with Carillion and in other places, such as a Hilton hotel in Scotland, where a hairdresser absconded with £80,000, leaving four workers without a job, and the hotel said, "Not our responsibility." We need to deal with that issue, too. Where an employer absconds or goes bust, the principal contractor should be responsible for the wages and the terms and conditions of its workers.

I thank you, Mr McCabe, for calling me to speak, and I thank the hon. Member for Barnsley East for securing the debate.

5.6 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): As an employment rights lawyer for many years, I have seen time and again how insecure work can blight people's lives. Between 2006 and 2016, there was a 49.8% increase in self-employment in London. That increase may not, as some claim, indicate an upsurge in entrepreneurial spirit, but it is a symptom of an ever more insecure workforce.

I spent the first part of my career working on holiday pay claims for construction workers. Many worked for the same company day in, day out under the strict control of their boss and without taking any of their own financial risk, but they were routinely told that they were self-employed and therefore not entitled to holiday pay, let alone to notice or protection against unfair dismissal.

Many years later, the issue of bogus self-employment has certainly not gone away, as demonstrated by the claim brought by Uber drivers, which was supported by the GMB. Uber tried to categorise its drivers as self-employed and said that they were not entitled to holiday pay or the national minimum wage, despite the fact that they were subject to Uber's rules and training, were obliged to accept fares and could be penalised if they accepted a job and then cancelled. In a scathing employment tribunal judgment, those drivers were found to be employees. Time and again, unions and tribunals have stepped in where unscrupulous employers have thought they can get away with it.

Agency work is another area of insecure work that desperately needs reform. The Agency Workers Regulations 2010 brought in limited rights for agency workers—after 12 weeks, they are entitled to the same pay as they would be if they had been hired directly by the company—but there are a number of significant problems with those regulations. A loophole called the Swedish derogation

means that agency workers can be exempted from equal treatment on pay if they have a permanent contract with the agency and it pays them a minimum amount between jobs. The reality is that agencies simply put workers on one job after another with the same hirer for many years, and that those workers never get equal pay with workers who are directly employed.

Moreover, the regulations do not create a presumption of employment with the hirer. For example, a factory worker who has worked in the same factory for 20 years but is employed via an agency could be dismissed on a whim. As the factory is not deemed to be her employer, she cannot claim unfair dismissal or redundancy against it. Surely that cannot be right.

Although the Taylor review may have been a step in the right direction, it simply did not go far enough. It is time for actions, not words, from the Government. Let us have a presumption of direct employment for agency workers, close the door to bogus self-employment and ban zero-hours contracts, and have better enforcement and tougher penalties for those who flout the law. Let us end the exploitation once and for all.

5.9 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on setting the scene so well.

When I first saw the phrase “gig economy”, I thought of nightlife, but then all of a sudden I realised that this issue is about people’s lives. The debate is about casual workers and those on zero-hours contracts and, if we look across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the rights of fully covered workers are clearly not happening for them. It is more like a nightmare, with no holiday pay, no sick pay or any idea of what wages the next week will bring.

From the beginning, however, I want to make it clear that many small shops and companies need that flexibility. It is important, and I think that every Member who has spoken so far has said that. So, if a small company employs a student during the summer time for a break of two or three months, or something like that, that is quite acceptable. We must also be aware, however, that many people consistently work up to four times longer than their eight-hour contract. The question is: why, and how can we do something to protect workers from being exploited?

I am pleased to say that Northern Ireland has the UK’s lowest proportion of workers on controversial zero-hours contracts. Indeed, a 2016 report from the Office for National Statistics revealed that only 1.9% of workers in Northern Ireland, or about 15,500 people, were employed in that way. In the UK as a whole, however, the figures are extreme, with 900,000 people on a zero-hours basis in their main job.

One of my major concerns about those on zero-hours contracts stems from the fact that, in my constituency, almost 23% of children live in poverty. That is partly due to people being on zero-hours contracts. When they are working 32 hours, getting that new pair of shoes for their child seems doable, but when they only get eight hours of work the next week, the question is not “Which shoes?” but “How are we going to eat this week?”

I want to make a quick point about food banks—I will only take a short time, because I want to be fair to speakers after me. In Northern Ireland, we gave out

some 32,433 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis between April ’17 and March ’18, and some 13,300 of those went to children. That figure is up 13% on the past year.

I am making a point but being careful about what I say, because I know that people need to have some of these things, but I also know that they need protection. That is what this debate is about, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on it. People are struggling, and a way to help is to afford them certainty of hours and ensure that they do not feel forced into overtime for fear of losing their jobs. There is work to be done, and I look to the Minister to outline how we can begin to do that seriously, and to ensure that there is a true balance of mutually beneficial flexibility.

5.11 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): My constituent James Bloodworth spent six months undercover working for some of the UK’s most notorious organisations for insecure work. His book, “Hired: Six Months Undercover in Low-Wage Britain”, is an astonishing insight into the day-to-day reality of such workers.

Amazon was the worst, James said. He had a zero-hours contract and he even faced a disciplinary for days off sick. It is no wonder that 74% of Amazon staff are too scared to go to the toilet in case they fall behind with their productivity targets. To quote:

“Each of us carried around with us a hand-held device that tracked our every move as if we were convicts on house arrest.”

Uber was not much better, he said, with constraints even on what can be discussed inside the car and a requirement to accept jobs although it might not be financially beneficial to do so. Likewise his time as a careworker, with relentless targets that left him with mere moments to visit each elderly person on his round. It is no wonder that 47% of careworkers leave their post within a year.

Some people see insecure work as a modern way of flexible working, but the reality is that those in the gig economy do not enjoy the flexibility. Of course, it is not only the workers and their families who lose out; so does the whole community, with the fake self-employed status of gig economy workers costing the taxpayer a staggering £75 million a week in lost tax and benefit payouts. That is equivalent to 20% of this week’s promised budget boost for the NHS by 2023.

The reality is that Jeff Bezos, Will Shu and Charlie Mullins become richer and richer off the back of their insecure employment methods, to the detriment of both staff and society. It is time that the Government stuck up not only for those workers, but for this country.

5.13 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing the debate and on the powerful case that she made. Like me, she came to this place as a union activist and union member of staff. I refer colleagues to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Let us be clear about this: insecure work, especially that which is low paid, is a disease in my community. It causes ill health, poverty and low aspirations, and wittingly or unwittingly we immerse ourselves in it every day. It is

[Alex Norris]

the delivery driver about whom we wonder why they left quite so quickly; that is because of the timeframe in which they are trying to deliver their packages. It is the barista who serves us our coffee in the morning. It is the driver who drops us off after a night out. It is around us, and it is in plain sight.

Recently commissioned Government statistics show that a quarter of workers in the gig economy are paid below the national minimum wage. We would not accept that in any salaried sector. It is a cause of national scandal, and we ought to do something about it. It is right that we, as a Parliament, take an interest in this, but we need our Government to show leadership on it. At the moment we are actually looking to those outside Government to show that leadership, and I make absolutely no apologies for praising the work of our trade unions—of my union GMB, of Unite, of USDAW and of others—in shining a light on this issue, and of my Labour colleagues in trying to make this point. Look how many of us have come for the debate.

Our trade unions, which are the voice of workers across the country, have repeatedly warned that individuals are being pressured into signing away their rights and too often have to accept low pay as a default. Companies use whatever loopholes and grubby shortcuts they need to exploit people's desperation. We have a responsibility to act, to close those loopholes and to stand up for the employee who, in that moment, simply cannot stand up for themselves.

On the sorts of actions we should ask for, the Trades Union Congress has come up with a helpful list of five wins that would improve matters very quickly and that could be acted on immediately. They are: banning zero-hours contracts, to ensure that workers get guaranteed hours; ensuring equal pay for agency workers by ending the Swedish derogation; cracking down on bogus self-employment and ensuring that those workers enjoy the same basic rights as other employees; allowing trade unions to access all workplaces, to support workers who need representation the most; and increasing resources and powers for enforcement.

Steps such as those, which put workers and people first—including those in my community—are what we need. They are what I want from Parliament and they are what we need our Government to act on.

5.16 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this important debate. The casualisation of the jobs market is nothing new. For decades now this country has been moving from an industrial, export-led economy to a services-led economy. Over that period we have begun to see—at an increasing pace—a race to the bottom in jobs, pay and terms and conditions for working people. That is why the debate is so important.

In my capacity as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on taxis, I have raised concerns about the taxi and private hire industry, which other hon. Members have referred to. For anyone in any doubt about the agenda of those companies and the way they treat their workers, look at the way that companies such as Uber

have had to be dragged kicking and screaming through the courts by trade unions, on behalf of their members—Uber workers—to be made to provide the basic terms and conditions and decent wages that everyone should enjoy.

I am proud of the role that GMB has played, of my party's relationship with the trade unions and of the support I have enjoyed as a trade union member and supporter, which is reflected in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. However, people should not have to rely on trade unions or High Court judges to protect their basic rights and terms and conditions; they should have a Government and a legal framework that is on their side, which they clearly do not.

We have heard nonsense about flexibility—about how flexible the gig economy is and how people really enjoy the choice. How many people would choose that flexibility for themselves?

Gillian Keegan: Me and many others.

Wes Streeting: I am happy to give way, but how many Members would choose to earn less than a real living wage or not to receive holiday pay and maternity or paternity pay? The truth is that, when we are looking at the way our economy will change—the next phase of globalisation, and the next phase of the industrial revolution that will change our country—how we protect the value of labour will be one of the single biggest questions that defines our political generation. It is about skills, but fundamentally it is about shaping the economy in the interests of ordinary working people and not allowing tech companies, top-heavy business models or digital platforms to shape it in their interests.

The Taylor review was a wonderful opportunity to answer and to meet some of these big challenges. Matthew Taylor is a great guy with a big brain, but clearly, because of his working for this Government and within the political framework in which he knew the report would be received, that report was not nearly ambitious enough. If that was not disappointing in and of itself, the fact that we have seen so little action off the back of it tells workers that they cannot rely on this Government to protect their interests. We desperately need a Labour Government that will put their interests and their rights at work front and centre.

5.19 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) for securing this important debate. Insecure work and the gig economy are increasingly and rapidly becoming the norm. Indeed, I have spoken to youngsters out there who have never known a full-time, permanent contract or secure hours. Far too often, work in the gig economy comes with the erosion of employment rights—something that those who have worked in the creative industries know only too well. When I worked in television, we used to call ourselves the original gig economy, because just about all the work was casual and just about everyone was self-employed.

I will use my contribution this afternoon to highlight two particular points: maternity rights and pregnancy discrimination. Pregnancy discrimination is something that affects women no matter what type of employment

they are in. The Women and Equalities Committee estimates that 54,000 women a year are dismissed or made redundant, or feel they have no choice but to leave their job, because of pregnancy. That is simply not good enough, but I suspect it is even worse in the gig economy. When the work is insecure and short term, the reality for many women is that once they start showing, they simply will not receive any more contracts. That is something that actors know all too well.

We need to put protections in against that culture becoming more widespread across our economy. I know that in response to the Taylor review, the Government said that they were reviewing maternity legislation, and they committed to updating the advice on the Government website this summer, but the truth is that when it comes to pregnancy discrimination the Taylor review did not go nearly far enough. It does not recommend any concrete change for pregnant women or new mothers. It makes a reference to employment tribunal fees making enforcement of rights difficult, but it does not say that fees should be scrapped. It does not mention access to antenatal care, which is a big problem for many women in casual work. It does not mention the specific health and safety needs of pregnant women and new mothers in casual forms of work, nor does it deal with their specific concerns about sick pay and qualification for maternity pay. Those issues should all be fundamental rights for all mums.

Moving on to maternity leave and pay, I think we all agree that the introduction of shared parental leave and pay is a big step forward. It is, for those in conventional employment. It is not available for freelancers or the self-employed. That is why I have introduced my ten-minute rule Bill, which would allow mums to share the maternity allowance with their freelance partners. It would cost the Treasury very little, and I know the Treasury seems quite sympathetic toward it. I simply encourage the Minister not to let this issue slip off the radar.

In summary, although I believe the Government should move swiftly to implement elements of the Taylor review, I would encourage them not to limit their thinking. Pregnancy discrimination is rife and by some measures it is getting worse. Freelance mums and dads deserve the flexibility afforded to other families. That is a matter of fairness, so now please let us get on with it.

5.22 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I add my thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing the debate.

I will just make three broad points. First, it is extraordinary that the Government have not got a grip on the debate. It is not a marginal issue. One in five workers in this country are now self-employed—a bigger proportion than public service workers. If public service workers in this country were confronting the kinds of conditions and suffering the kinds of stories we heard this afternoon, there would be a national scandal. Why are we not getting to grips with this challenge for the country's self-employed?

If the present day is not bad enough, hon. Members should think about what is to come. Over the next 10 years this economy will be fundamentally transformed by automation, Brexit and the rise of China. Automation alone is likely to destroy five times more working-class jobs than the shutdowns of the coal and steel industries

put together. We know that trend is coming; we know what happened when coal and steel were lost to communities across the country in the 1980s. What grew back were the kinds of insecure jobs we are debating now. Let us not make that mistake again. Let us put in place now a regime for good jobs in the years to come.

Secondly, we have to look again at why it is that basic laws, such as the right to trade union organising or the right to the national minimum wage, are not being enforced today. I commend James Bloodworth's book on the scandals we have heard about. I had the honour of meeting him this afternoon. It beggars belief that some of the biggest firms on the planet, such as Amazon, are being caught not paying the national minimum wage. Where is the inspectorate? Where are the prosecutions? Where are the court cases? Is the Minister prepared to tell us what he is doing to ensure that justice is done?

We have had a useful debate this afternoon about the shortcomings of the Taylor review. The economy will inevitably grow in the years to come, so we have to try to equalise definitions of workers. We have to do away with the nonsense of the Swedish derogation and put in place the kind of action plan that the TUC has carefully and thoughtfully developed.

I will leave the Minister with this thought: there is a basic injustice in a marketplace where, over the course of a single morning, James Bloodworth can earn £29 working in an Amazon warehouse but the wealth of Jeff Bezos goes up by \$1.4 billion. We had a long tradition in this country of entrepreneurs, such as George Cadbury, William Lever and John Spedan Lewis, who not only built great businesses, but changed society for the better. We need the Government to ensure that the entrepreneurs of today are doing a damn sight better job on that front.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Just before I call the Front-Benchers, the debate is scheduled to finish at 5.51 pm, so there should be enough time for the mover of the motion to make a brief reply, and for the Minister, if he is so minded, to take an intervention or two. That is, obviously, up to him.

5.25 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this timely and important debate.

As we have heard from the contributions this afternoon, a lot of people are rightly concerned about the fate of workers in the gig economy. The hon. Lady talked about the insecure employment of between 1 million and 3 million people, which is an outstanding figure to contemplate. She talked about the balance of power lying with employers, about how unscrupulous companies are using employees, especially in distribution warehouses and the public sector, and tellingly about how there is little future for those trapped in such employment. The £300 million in lost national insurance contributions alone should be of interest to the Government.

I would love to cover everybody who spoke in the debate, but that will not be possible, so I will refer to some hon. Members and not others. However, I thought everybody made a telling contribution. My hon. Friend

[Drew Hendry]

the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) rightly commended Better than Zero for the work that it has done and talked about the difference between the 4,504 full-time-equivalent people chasing social security claimants and the 400 workers chasing people regarding employment rights and compliance. I thought the key moment was when he spoke about career advisers not advising anyone to go for a zero-hours-contract career.

My hon. Friend rightly talked about shift cancellations and adjustments and suggested that people should be paid double time in such circumstances. There has to be a consequence if people are turning up at work and finding out that the goal posts have shifted for them unfairly. He also talked about the status of the definition of a worker and the responsibility of the principal contractor.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) was the only Tory MP to speak, which is a telling shame. She rightly said that the gig economy can provide opportunities for people, but as we have noted, flexibility is used too often as an excuse for exploitation. That is not good enough for people.

Hon. Members talked about people without proper jobs, such as those on zero-hours contracts, not having a future and struggling to keep their head above water and about the need to treat people with respect. The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) rightly talked about the move from an industrial to a services economy. That was backed up later when one of his colleagues talked about the move to automation. There are real challenges and workers need to be protected. As the hon. Member for Ilford North said, people should not have to rely on trade unions to make those points; they should have those protections.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) rightly talked about women—a subject too often overlooked in detail—and the issues of pregnancy sick pay and maternity leave. Her ten-minute rule Bill sounds eminently sensible. I look forward to seeing the detail, but I am sure that that is something the Government should consider.

The Scottish National party firmly opposes exploitative zero-hours contracts and other types of employment that offer workers little or no job security. Scotland is ahead of the curve in promoting fairer working practices and protecting workers' rights. Only today, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) sought leave to bring in a Bill for a genuinely representative body for the armed forces. The SNP has led on such matters at Westminster and on tackling exploitative work practices. Too often, when exploitative zero-hours contracts are used, it is said that they will provide flexibility, but the workers simply end up being exploited. Those workers often have too few alternative options. Where that practice occurs, or is likely, there should be a ban.

The Scottish Government were the first Government in the UK to become an accredited living wage employer. New guidance has been issued, to ensure that companies that bid for public sector contracts cannot use exploitative zero-hours contracts. Scotland is the best performer of all the four countries in the UK, with the highest proportion of employees paid the living wage or more.

The figure is 81.6%, compared with 78% in England, 75% in Wales and 72% in Northern Ireland. We have more than 1,200 accredited living wage employers in Scotland, paying a minimum of £8.75 an hour, which is the new real living wage.

In 2015, the Scottish Government introduced the Fair Work Convention, so that fair work will be embedded in the workplace by 2025. The Scottish business pledge has signed up 498 companies, including Coca-Cola, Microsoft and Virgin Money, to demonstrate a commitment to fair work, employee engagement and, crucially, productivity. That is where companies can really take the benefit: when workers are treated properly and get a fair wage and conditions, they are far more productive in the workplace. That is demonstrable.

The Scottish Government are developing a fair work charter, to be finalised this year in conjunction with the TUC as a guide for employers and workers who face unexpected events, including severe weather such as the beast from the east, but we could do more. The Smith commission proposed that the administration of 22 reserved tribunals be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, where we could make a further difference, but the UK Government have yet to do that. Those matters cover the underlying substantive rights and duties that remain reserved to this place, so I ask the Minister whether he will now commit to acting on the issue, devolve the remaining powers and allow more protection for Scottish workers?

5.33 pm

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing this important debate, and on the thoughtful, passionate contributions made by colleagues today—all but one of them from the Opposition. It seems that the Government's ruthless whipping ended with the last vote to happen in the Chamber.

My hon. Friend eloquently captured the fear and precariousness associated with modern workforce practices in the gig economy. She made the crucial point at the heart of the issue: there is a fundamental power inequality between the employee and the employer, and we cannot reply to that inherent difficulty in the gig economy with consultations. To remedy it, there must be recognition in law that the power imbalance exists. A pattern that has emerged as a feature of the gig economy is the process of outsourcing and of apps as managers. Those who reap inordinate profits from workers' labour are distant from accountability for them and from their welfare. They have relinquished that responsibility.

Hon. Members have told us about people who have had long, loyal relationships with a company but have been refused employment contracts and have been left languishing with few or no workplace rights. Members are, rightly, deeply disappointed with the Government's response to the Taylor review. It was a consultation, and for the Government to conduct a consultation on a consultation seems a weak response.

I really need the toilet right now, probably because I am eight and a half months pregnant, and my lasting memory from the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) is of people being too scared to go to the toilet because they are worried about what will happen

to their jobs, which is an absolute disgrace. That people are too scared to go to the toilet in this century, never mind any other century, is absolutely terrible.

The Conservatives and the Government boast about the recovery of employment and lower employment figures, but, sadly, for millions of people work means rising insecurity and low pay. Average real pay has still not returned to the level it was before the financial crisis, and the Resolution Foundation predicts that this is likely to be the weakest decade of real pay growth in almost two centuries. We might have high employment, but we also have record poverty among those in work, so a celebration of employment figures alone is completely disingenuous. What are the Government actually celebrating? More than 8 million working people live in poverty. In 2018, that is an absolute disgrace. The Minister celebrates low unemployment but fails to recognise the poor quality of those jobs.

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that it is utterly perverse that many of the people in low-paid insecure work are forced to rely on tax credits? In other words, all of us as taxpayers are funding the exploitative business models of their employers who do not pay their staff proper wages.

Laura Pidcock: It is absolutely nonsensical that the state should subsidise inordinate profits on the one hand and very poor pay on the other. The reality of modern work for millions of people, particularly in the north and in places such as North West Durham, is short-termism, insecurity, low pay and fear. Fixed-term contracts, enforced self-employment and agency work signal a move towards a more casualised and fragmented world of work. The use of zero-hours contracts increased rapidly in the wake of the financial crisis, increasing two and a half times between 2012 and 2016. The latest figures available show that that is not abating. We have had an increase from 1.4 million to 1.8 million in just six months.

When Conservative Members celebrate the flexibility—this has been mentioned many times—of zero-hours contracts, they have a romanticised vision of a student who perhaps wants summer work, but the reality is very different. One in three people on a zero-hours contract wants more hours.

Justin Madders: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Laura Pidcock: I have very little time; I am sorry.

A whole industry has exploded to formalise and professionalise insecurity at work, including through the use and abuse of new technology. It is absolutely right that we view that as the challenge of our generation. How we meet the challenges of technology replacing management structures with apps essentially being the employer is one of the most pressing issues. We need to take robust legislative action against that.

Despite the Government's shameful resistance to protecting workers, we saw two landmark cases in the gig economy last week. First, a decision by the Supreme Court in favour of Gary Smith against Pimlico Plumbers, as has been mentioned, established that he was a worker and not self-employed. There must be an immediate end to exploitative employment practices. Last Friday, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain won its right to pursue its case against Deliveroo, and I wish it luck.

I will end by saying that all the evidence shows that the best way to guarantee fair pay and protections at work is by strengthening the voices of workers through our trade unions—I am a member of Unite, so I register that interest—and by enabling the unions to organise and bargain collectively. That is why an incoming Labour Government would bring about a workplace rights revolution and create a new ministry of labour, which is not currently a Department, to give workers and trade unions long overdue rights and protections in law. We will of course repeal the shameless Trade Union Act 2016 and introduce new legislation to roll out sectoral collective bargaining.

Dan Carden: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Laura Pidcock: I am so sorry; I cannot. I have gone over my time already, and I want to ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East manages to sum up.

Hon. Members have given the Minister many solutions for zero-hours contracts, such as the Swedish derogation, equal rights for agency workers and, crucially, enforcement—things will not improve without enforcement. It is only with workers and trade unions at the heart of workplace decision-making processes that we will tame and eventually eradicate the abuses in the gig economy. I look forward to hearing the Minister set out what I am sure will be exciting and groundbreaking announcements to end the inherent exploitation at the heart of the gig economy.

5.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): As always, it is a great honour and pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe.

It is also a great honour and pleasure to take part in what I think we all agree has been a very important, well-attended and very positive debate about the desire of Members from all parties in this House to protect the most vulnerable workers in our society. I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) on securing it and on the magnificent way in which she spoke up for workers in her constituency and across the country.

Employment rights and protections are important for this Government. In fact, the Government have made a commitment to seek to enhance rights and protections in the modern workplace. The gig economy and agency working offer great opportunities and new ways in which to participate in the labour market. For many people, they have transformed their opportunities to work when and how they want, and produced a flexible and dynamic way to work.

Justin Madders: Will the Minister give way?

Andrew Griffiths: I will give way just once; Members will understand that I am short on time.

Justin Madders: It is very generous of the Minister to give way. Obviously, we have heard a lot about flexibility, but if someone is reliant on these employers to give them work, does he think that the landlord will be flexible in getting the rent for that month?

Andrew Griffiths: I completely understand the hon. Gentleman's point. That is why we have recognised that those opportunities come with risks, and that some in the workforce need greater protections.

The UK's flexible, dynamic labour market has allowed the economy to bounce back from Labour's recession and has delivered record employment; unemployment is at the lowest rates for 40 years. However, we recognise that it has not worked for all. It was for that reason that Matthew Taylor was asked by this Government to examine the current labour market and employment law framework, to help us to understand the opportunities of future working practices as well as to identify areas where the labour market was not working for everyone.

That is why in February the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy made a commitment in the industrial strategy to take responsibility for the quality of work, which was the first time ever that a Government focused on quality as well as quantity of work. Our aim is to drive forward the change required to ensure that creating quality of work is given equal priority to the quantity of work that is created.

Our detailed response to the Taylor review was published on 7 February. In that response, we committed to take forward 52 of the 53 recommendations. Our response clearly demonstrates that we are progressing with our commitment to take firm action to protect the most vulnerable, the lowest paid and those who work in a non-traditional way.

For example, we have consulted on state enforcement to ensure that vulnerable workers get their holiday and sick pay; we have asked the Low Pay Commission to consider higher minimum wage rates for workers on zero-hours contracts; we are providing all 1.2 million agency workers with a clear breakdown of who pays them, and of any costs or charges that are deducted from their wages; we are ensuring that all workers get an up-front statement of terms and conditions from day one; we are making it easier for flexible workers to accrue employment rights, by extending the permissible breaks in continuous service; and we are creating a right to request a stable contract for all workers. To progress that work, we have very recently completed four consultations on employment status, agency workers, transparency and enforcement, which are necessary to deliver the change that this Government wish to see.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East asked whether we would give workers the same equal pay rights as other employees. The Government do not support or condone the use of Swedish derogation contracts to circumvent equal pay entitlements. Let me be absolutely clear on that. That is why we have consulted to gather views and evidence on our response. Options include repeal or regulation in relation to the use of the Swedish derogation. Before taking a final decision, it is right that we consider the views coming forward properly in that consultation.

The hon. Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock) accused the Government of ruthless whipping. As a former Whip, I take great exception to that. She raised the issue of zero-hours contracts, but the number of people reporting that they are employed on a zero-hours contract is down from 905,000 last year to 901,000. Some 6% of businesses use some form of a zero-hours

contract. There are 1.7 million temporary workers in the UK, but 28.4% of them said that they did not want a permanent job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) made a magnificent speech, and pointed out the challenges and the opportunities of the gig economy. She rightly said that 90% of gig economy workers are satisfied with the jobs they are doing.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), in his usual determined manner, said that there should be more people enforcing the minimum wage. I am delighted to tell him that the Government have continued to invest heavily in minimum wage enforcement. We have doubled the budget to £26.3 million, up from £13 million last year. As a result, we secured £15.6 million in arrears last year, covering 200,000 workers in this country who had redress thanks to the Government's support.

Chris Stephens: Will the Minister confirm that 25% of the posts at the national minimum wage compliance unit are still lying vacant?

Andrew Griffiths: I do not think that is right. I will write to the hon. Gentleman, but I assure him that those figures are wrong.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) asked what the Government have done about pregnancy and maternity discrimination—a subject that is dear to my heart and that of the hon. Member for North West Durham. In response to Taylor, we are working to improve the guidance and advice on pregnancy and maternity rights and employers' obligations. We also committed to review redundancy protection within the next 12 months. The hon. Member for Batley and Spen asked about shared parental leave for self-employed people. As she recognises, it is under review. I cannot commit to that today, but once again she makes that point loud and clear.

The Taylor review considered not only the plight of agency workers, which many hon. Members raised. In his 2018-19 strategy, the director of labour market enforcement published recommendations to support those workers. In response to Matthew Taylor's recommendations on agency workers, the Government have already committed to take action and improve transparency on pay and on the rate workers will receive on taking up assignments. Quite simply, it is not right that individuals do not receive the advertised rate of pay.

I have mentioned the issue of the Swedish derogation. We are also considering extending the Employment Agency Standards inspectorate's remit better to protect agency workers from emerging challenges in the labour market. We are looking at whether it should include umbrella companies, about which we all have concerns. I am sure the hon. Member for Barnsley East understands that I cannot pre-empt the results of the Taylor consultation. It is clear that Members on both sides of the House agree that agency workers' employment rights need special consideration and protection.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK is a great place not just to grow a business, but to work. We understand that being employed is not enough if the employee is at risk of being exploited or mistreated

by their employer. We have consulted on options for what would be the most radical shake-up of our employment law in decades and we will take the necessary action to protect workers across the United Kingdom.

5.48 pm

Stephanie Peacock: I begin by thanking you, Mr McCabe, as well as the Minister, the SNP spokesperson and especially the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock)—I believe this is her final debate, so I wish her well in her maternity leave—for their contributions. Most importantly, I thank all hon. Members from across the House. We have seen in all the contributions just how insecure and precarious work is affecting our constituents.

As was rightly pointed out, the Opposition make no apology for trade unions being the voice of working people. I pay tribute to my union, the GMB, and all trade unions campaigning on this issue. A number of examples were given of the work they do, and in particular the simple steps put forward by the TUC that could tackle the problem.

We heard many appalling examples of the treatment of workers by a number of companies and the devastating impact of that on workers' health. There were examples

of exploitation of working practices, the impact of automation and the truly shocking level of in-work poverty, which is an absolute scandal. All that testimony combined to form a truly damning portrait of the lives of workers with insecure employment. It is a picture of people trapped in low-paid work who are treated without dignity or respect by their employers, who exploit short-term working practices to maximise their profit at the expense of their workers' security. Some are driven into debt, struggling to buy food or pay bills; others into ill health. It is not good enough.

For all the Minister's statistics, we need action, and we need it now. The Government must act now to end exploitative working practices, provide an economy that works for everyone and ensure that hard-working people in Barnsley and across the UK are provided with the long-term secure employment they desperately need.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered insecure work and the gig economy.

5.50 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 20 June 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Business Impact Target

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): This statement sets the Government's business impact target in respect of the economic impact on business of regulation which comes into or ceases to be in force for this Parliament, along with related matters as required under section 21 of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 ("the Act").

It is important to recognise that the Government are setting an ambitious target. The Government are committed to providing legal certainty and a stable environment for business by incorporating all EU law into UK law, as well as taking necessary action in areas such as product safety, plastics and corporate governance. Consequently, the Government will continue to monitor regulatory impacts rigorously, while placing the importance of regulating to tackle these nationally important issues above a strict adherence to the target.

Business impact target¹

The Government's target is for a saving of £9 billion to business and voluntary or community bodies from qualifying measures that come into force or cease to be in force during this Parliament.

Interim target²

The interim target covers the savings to be achieved from qualifying measures that come into force or cease to be in force in the first three years of this Parliament. The Government's interim target is a saving of £4.5 billion.

Measurement of the business impact target³

The impact of each qualifying measure will be assessed on the basis of its equivalent annual net direct cost to business (EANDCB) measured in 2016 prices and with a 2017 present value base year. As in the previous Parliament, the contribution to the business impact target will be the sum of the EANDCB over the first five years for which the measure will be in force, or the sum of the EANDCB over the full lifetime of the measure for measures that are, or will be, in force for less than five years.

Qualifying regulatory provisions⁴

Under the Act, the measures that are in scope for the business impact target are described as "regulatory provisions". That includes both legislation and the activities of Ministers and listed regulators. The Government must designate the categories of regulatory provisions that are to be scored against the target ("qualifying regulatory provisions"). Qualifying regulatory provisions are regulatory provisions that do not fall within any of the exclusions set out below:

- a) Regulatory provisions that have been certified by Departments or regulators as falling under the de minimis rule, namely those that have an EANDCB of less than ± £5 million;
- b) Regulatory provisions that implement new or changed obligations from European Union regulations, decisions and directives, and other international commitments and obligations,

except in cases of gold-plating. This includes measures incorporating EU law into domestic law under the EU Withdrawal Bill and legislation made for the purpose of implementing the EU withdrawal agreement, including implementation of new EU law during the implementation period.

c) Regulatory provisions that have been certified by Departments or regulators as dealing with deficiencies in retained EU law (under the EU Withdrawal Bill and other legislation);

d) Regulatory provisions that are intended to deliver—or to replicate—better competition-based outcomes in markets characterised by market power;

e) Regulatory provisions relating to systemic financial risk;

f) Regulatory provisions relating to civil emergencies;

g) Regulatory provisions concerning fines and penalties, and redress and restitution;

h) Regulatory provisions that implement changes to the classification and scheduling of drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 where these follow the recommendations of the relevant independent advisory body;

i) Regulatory provisions that have been certified by Departments or regulators as relating to the safety of tenants, residents and occupants in buildings that stem from, or relate to, Government's response to the Grenfell tragedy, reviews, inquiries or working groups;

j) Regulator casework including specific investigation and enforcement activity, individual licence decisions, and individual advice;

k) Education, communications activities, and promotional campaigns by regulators, including media campaigns, posters, factsheets, bulletins, letters, websites, and information/advice helplines;

l) Policy development by regulators, including formal and informal consultations, policy reviews, and ad hoc information requests;

m) Changes to the organisation and management of regulators, except for those resulting from legislative changes or another policy change that is a qualifying regulatory provision;

¹ As required under section 21(1)(a) of the Act.

² As required under section 21 (2) of the Act.

³ As required under section 21 (3)(b) of the Act.

⁴ As required under section 21 (3)(a) of the Act.

[HCWS776]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media Matters

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): On 1 May 2018, I informed the House that I had issued a public interest intervention notice (PIIN) in respect of the acquisition by Trinity Mirror plc (now known as Reach plc) of certain publishing assets of Northern & Shell Media Group Ltd.

The PIIN triggered the requirement for the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to report to me on jurisdictional and competition matters, and for Ofcom to report on the following two media public interest considerations:

First, the need for, to the extent that it is reasonable and practicable, a sufficient plurality of views in newspapers in each market for newspapers in the United Kingdom or a part of the United Kingdom; and

Secondly, the need for free expression of opinion in newspapers.

I received the CMA and Ofcom reports on Thursday 31 May and have today published these on the gov.uk website.

I accept the CMA's findings that while it is, or may be, the case that a relevant merger situation has been created, the merger does not give rise to a realistic prospect of a substantial lessening of competition in any market.

I have also accepted Ofcom's conclusions that the merger does not raise concerns in relation to plurality of views, nor does it raise concerns in relation to free expression of opinion in newspapers.

In the light of this, and having considered representations submitted by interested parties in response to the PIIN, I have written to the parties today confirming my decision not to refer the merger for a phase 2 investigation.

I have also notified the CMA, in accordance with section 56(1) of the Enterprise Act 2002, to now deal with the matter from a competition perspective.

The role of the Secretary of State in this process is quasi-judicial and procedures are in place to ensure that I act independently and have followed a process which is fair and impartial.

[HCWS779]

Post-Council for Transport, Telecoms and Energy

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): The Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council (TTE) took place in Luxembourg. Lord Ashton of Hyde represented the UK at the telecoms session of the Council, on 8 June.

Member states (MS) were asked to vote on a general approach (GA) on the Cybersecurity Act regulation. The UK voted in favour of this GA, after having received waivers from the European Scrutiny Committee (ESC) and European Union Committee (EUC).

This Council went on to hold a progress report/policy debate on the proposed regulation concerning e-privacy, in which the presidency urged MS to help drive progress on the e-privacy regulation.

The Austrian delegation then set out its work programme as the incoming presidency for the second half of 2018. As part of its commitment to completing various digital single market (DSM) initiatives, the Austrian delegation highlighted the importance of continued work on the e-privacy regulation and made clear its ambition to achieve a GA on a .eu top level domain name during the course of its presidency. The Austrian delegation also noted that the next TTE telecoms Council would be held on 4 December 2018.

This session of the Council went on to engage in a policy debate on the directive on the reuse of public sector information (PSI).

The presidency then provided information on the directive on the European electronic communications code (EECC); the regulation on the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC); and the regulation on a framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the EU.

To conclude this session of the Council, the Commission provided information on the state of play of the DSM.

[HCWS778]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offensive and Dangerous Weapons: Consultation Responses

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): On 14 October 2017 the Government published a public consultation paper on proposals for new legislative measures on offensive and dangerous weapons.

The proposals included making it a criminal offence for knives purchased online to be delivered to a residential address, making it a criminal offence to possess certain offensive weapons in private and extending the offence of possessing a knife or offensive weapon on school premises to a wider range of educational institutions. Other legislative proposals included amending the offences of threatening with an article with a blade or point or an offensive weapon and updating the definition of a flick knife. The consultation also sought views on making it a criminal offence to sell products containing certain corrosive substances to those under the age of 18 and to possess corrosive substances in a public place, and prohibiting certain large calibre rifles and rapid firing rifles under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968.

The consultation closed on 9 December and I am today publishing a summary of the responses that the consultation received. A copy of the summary will be placed in the House Library and will be available on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS780]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Gosport Investigation Report

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today the report of the Gosport independent panel on events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital from the late 1980s to 2001 has been published.

This report follows four years of work by Bishop James Jones and his panel. The Bishop has adopted a strong commitment to a "families first" approach to public disclosure, which means that the process of public disclosure began earlier today with the families themselves.

The report provides a comprehensive account of events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital from the late 1980s to 2001. It has drawn on previous reviews but also on important new material unearthed by the panel.

Given the gravity of issues and the content and scale of the report, we will need to consider its findings with great care and thoroughness across Government in the coming weeks.

All relevant agencies and Departments both nationally and locally, including the Home Office and Ministry of Justice are also giving the report urgent and thorough attention. Once that work is done, the relevant agencies will decide what steps to take next.

Copies of the report have been laid before the House and are available from the Vote Office and at: <https://www.gosportpanel.independent.gov.uk/panel-report/>

An oral statement will be delivered to both Houses later today.

[HCWS577]

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