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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 26 November 2018**

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# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JUNE 2017)

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2017]

SIXTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 650

TWENTY-FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2017-2019

### House of Commons

*Monday 26 November 2018*

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

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Commonwealth: UK National Security**

1. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of the contribution of the Commonwealth to UK national security. [907798]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** The national security capabilities review emphasised the importance of our bilateral and regional relationships, and our influence in international institutions. The Commonwealth is an integral element of our global approach.

**Sir David Amess:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that Commonwealth troops made a vital contribution to our successes in the first and second world wars? Accordingly, what measures is his Department taking to encourage more Commonwealth citizens to join the British armed forces?

**Gavin Williamson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. More than 3 million Commonwealth and empire soldiers took part in the great war, serving alongside British servicemen, and 200,000 lost their lives. We are looking at increasing the number of Commonwealth nationals who can join our armed forces, as we recognise the important contribution they made to our international armed forces.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that we owe a huge debt to the Commonwealth not only for conflicts of the past, but for those of the future? Is it not time that we started to use the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to actually talk about big issues such as defence and the things that join legislators across the world, rather than as a meaningless talking shop?

**Gavin Williamson:** We certainly do not want meaningless talking shops. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point; perhaps I should make him an honorary colonel to take the message right around the Commonwealth and get it across. He makes a valuable point about the important network of influence that the Commonwealth provides, which is demonstrated every time we visit Commonwealth countries. We are looking closely at how we can do more with Commonwealth armed forces.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Cyprus is a member of the Commonwealth and our sovereign base areas there are a vital part of Britain's defence. Cyprus is also a member of NATO and the EU. When my right hon. Friend speaks to his Cypriot counterparts, does he find that they share our concerns about the development of the European army that is now being proposed, and how that might undermine NATO?

**Gavin Williamson:** I have not had any conversations with my Cypriot opposite number about any European army, but let me be absolutely clear that Britain will not participate in a European army. The cornerstone of our defence in the United Kingdom, on continental Europe and in the north Atlantic is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, not the European Union.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What is the Secretary of State's assessment of the number of Commonwealth citizens who might join our Army next year?

**Gavin Williamson:** We expect up to 1,350 Commonwealth citizens to join our armed forces next year.

### Armed Forces: Mental Health

2. **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to provide mental health support to members of the armed forces. [907799]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** One third of us will be affected by a mental health condition or problem during our lifetime, and that applies also to those serving in the armed forces. The Prime Minister is very conscious of the issue and wants to remove the disparity between physical and mental health. It is why in 2017 we launched the mental health and wellbeing strategy, which is reaping dividends in removing the stigma attached to mental health issues.

**Bill Grant:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the good work done by Combat Stress at its Hollybush House facility in my constituency? Will he consider what further assistance can be given to such organisations in providing mental health support to current and former members of the armed forces?

**Mr Ellwood:** Combat Stress came about after the first world war, from which people were returning with conditions that we did not understand then. Today, 100 years later, Combat Stress continues to provide vital support, working with our armed forces to ensure that we provide the support necessary for those affected by such conditions, and I pay tribute to the work it has done. I recognise, however, that occasionally people do not get the treatment they are due. We are ensuring that all those who need it, no matter the circumstances, receive the support they deserve.

23. [907821] **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): The all-party group on mindfulness recently held an evidence session here in Parliament on the science and best practice of mindfulness in the UK fire, ambulance and police services and in the US marines. Will the Minister look at the evidence to see whether our UK armed forces could benefit from this science-based intervention?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. It is not just the armed forces who are subject to stress and other mental health issues. Our approach has been to promote better understanding of the issues he touches on to increase prevention, and better detection to provide early treatment. An awful lot can be done to compare notes and share best practice. I do that with the "Five Eyes" countries and I would be happy to sit down with him to discuss how we can do that for the blue light services, too.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Minister on Thursday's debate, which was both informative and very interesting. Will he commit to write to every health body and local authority to explain

exactly what they should be doing? I learnt an awful lot and they should be doing much more. I hope he will inform them of what they should be doing.

**Mr Ellwood:** One reason we introduced the Veterans Board, which is chaired by the Defence Secretary, was to hold other Government Departments to account. They have a duty of care to our armed forces personnel and their families, and to veterans. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments on the important debate we had last week. It is imperative that all clinical commissioning groups and local authorities recognise their duty to the armed forces covenant. We should have the same standards across the entire country.

### Trident

3. **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What assessment he has made of the importance of Trident to national security. [907800]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** The first responsibility of Government is the protection and defence of the United Kingdom and its citizens. Nuclear sits at the apex of our defence and deterrence strategy. It is there to deter the most extreme threats to our national security and our way of life.

**Jack Brereton:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. As we mark the 50th anniversary of the continuous at-sea deterrent and look to Trident's renewal, what more will he do to ensure that new supply chains benefit British manufacturers most, especially those in Stoke-on-Trent South?

**Gavin Williamson:** I am very much looking forward to joining my hon. Friend in a visit to Goodwin International, a brilliant example of a firm in Stoke-on-Trent that supplies the UK and operations right across the globe. It goes to show that the investment we are making in our nuclear deterrence not only benefits greatly the people of Barrow, but supports a global supply chain and an enormous supply chain in the United Kingdom.

**Mr Speaker:** For those who were not here on Thursday I reiterate, I hope on behalf of the whole House, congratulations to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) on her election as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It is with some joy that I call not only Mrs Madeleine Moon, but President Moon. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I wonder whether the Secretary of State agrees with me that the nuclear deterrent—I stress the word "deterrent"—is also a vital part of our NATO alliance security and defence strategy, and that it is vital not just for the UK but the whole of the alliance?

**Gavin Williamson:** If I may address Madam President on that point, Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady is absolutely right. We are the only country that assigns its nuclear deterrence to the defence of NATO, so it plays a vital role. It also plays an important role in ensuring that Britain is an even more powerful voice within NATO and acts in a real leadership role in that organisation.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): It is great to follow a president, for the first time in my life. Although we have strategic nuclear forces, we do not have tactical nuclear weapons. That is a gap in our strategic escalatory ladder. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that we work very closely with our NATO allies, which do have such weapons, so we can ensure no gaps in escalation if, heaven forbid, that were to be necessary?

**Gavin Williamson:** We always work very closely with all our NATO allies, looking at the broad range of threats that Britain and our NATO allies face. We often talk about nuclear deterrence, but we must not forget the importance of conventional deterrence as well, which is provided by all our forces, the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the British Army, whether that is about our forces having the right capabilities or where they are deployed. We are leading NATO in terms of our deployments in Estonia, Poland and, through the summer, Romania.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): In light of the press speculation about the financial position of Babcock plc, what assurances can the Secretary of State give not only that the company is able to carry out the current refits of our nuclear submarines, but about any threat that there is to our continuous at-sea deterrent?

**Gavin Williamson:** We always work incredibly closely with all our suppliers to ensure that there is uninterrupted supply and support for all our forces. That is what we will continue to do with Babcock.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The latest Russian aggression towards Ukraine shows the type of blackmail that western Europe could be subjected to if it did not have the protection of NATO's nuclear shield. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that this is not just about the jobs up in Cumbria? My father spent a lot of time refitting and maintaining our deterrent class fleet at Devonport, which is where we expect the Dreadnought class to be refitted.

**Gavin Williamson:** We can all be very proud of the skill and workmanship at the Devonport dockyard, which has been integral to looking after our nuclear deterrence for almost 50 years. It is something that it will continue to do long into the future.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Workers in Devonport dockyard are world class, their nuclear skills are second to none, and it is the only place in the country that can refit our nuclear submarines, but there is much disquiet about the communications between Babcock and the Ministry of Defence. Will the Secretary of State reassure us that the MOD and Babcock have picked up their communications so that any refit problems on HMS Vanguard—that Trident sub—can be resolved, and without the pressure of it looking as though our Trident subs will not be refitted on time?

**Gavin Williamson:** As I said earlier, we recognise not only the brilliant skills that are held at the Devonport dockyard, but the importance of having a strong relationship with all our suppliers. We always work very

closely, whether it is with Babcock, BAE Systems or Rolls-Royce, on the availability and deliverability of all our military assets.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): The Secretary of State was obviously missed at our CASD reception, but we understand that he had a rather important emergency Cabinet meeting and noted that when he emerged from it, he remained as the Defence Secretary, which was helpful. Will he pay tribute from the Dispatch Box to the work that has gone into ensuring that we have had the continuation of the deterrent for 50 years, and does he agree that the problems with the refits make it all the more important that we deliver Dreadnought on time?

**Gavin Williamson:** I formally offer my apologies for not being able to attend the reception, which I sadly had to miss, but I look forward to attending a future one, and I would like to formally record my thanks to the men and women of Barrow, who have continuously worked so hard to provide us with the world's cutting-edge submarine technology. Like the hon. Gentleman, I was very proud when I went through Barrow to see those Astute class submarines and the Dreadnought being built. It is absolutely integral to our national security. This is not just about the Royal Navy, but about the whole industrial supply chain pulling together to make sure that Dreadnought is delivered on time and in budget.

#### Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

4. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What representations he has made to his US counterpart on remaining in the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. [907801]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** We have a close dialogue with the United States at all levels on foreign and security policy, including the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty. We share US concerns about certain new Russian missiles. The treaty has played a valuable role in supporting Euro-Atlantic security. We want to see it continue to stand, but that requires all parties to comply.

**Drew Hendry:** The Trump Administration's withdrawal from the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty has prompted Putin to say that it

"wouldn't be left without an answer from our side."

Many are now concerned that this may have recklessly opened the door to a chilling new nuclear arms race. Does the Secretary of State share this concern over such hardball diplomacy?

**Gavin Williamson:** There is one nation that is in breach of the treaty, and it is Russia. It needs to start complying with that treaty, and it needs to comply immediately. It is a treaty between those two nations, and currently there is one nation that is not complying with it.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty of 1987 was based on the zero-option offer, which was a great two-sided

deal between the Soviet Union and the west. Does the Secretary of State think that there are any lessons to be drawn from the negotiations which led to that successful deal, in that the west faced down the Soviet Union, walked out—or, at least, allowed the Soviet Union to walk out—without a deal when the Russians refused to accept the zero-option offer, and waited for them to come back and do a genuine deal that benefited both sides? Does he think that that successful two-sided deal has any lessons to teach us for the purpose of certain other negotiations that have so far worked out a lot less happily?

**Gavin Williamson:** I cannot imagine what my right hon. Friend is referring to, but I think that when it comes to the issue of Russia's lack of compliance with its treaty obligations, we need to keep hammering home the message, with all our NATO allies, that it cannot ignore its treaty obligations and must start complying with them.

**John Spellar (Warley) (Lab):** Will the Secretary of State make clear that there could be dangers here, with threats not only to the INF treaty but to the strategic arms reduction treaty—START—talks on strategic nuclear weapons? Will he also, along with his colleagues in NATO, present a united front on NATO's assessment, and that of the United States, that Russia is in serious breach of the INF treaty? Will he urge the Americans—who have not, as far as I am aware, announced that they have withdrawn, but have announced an intention to withdraw—not to do so, but also make clear that this is not a reaction from Russia, but a reaction from the west to actions by Russia?

**Gavin Williamson:** The right hon. Gentleman's assessment is absolutely accurate. This is a US reaction to Russia's lack of compliance with its treaty obligations. It is important for the whole of NATO to speak with one voice and make clear to Russia that it must start complying with its treaty obligations.

**Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab):** On 25 October, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific said, in response to an urgent question that I had tabled on US withdrawal from the INF treaty,

"clearly we are in discussions with all our allies to avoid that outcome".—[*Official Report*, 25 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 442.]

At the same time, however, the Defence Secretary appeared to be supportive of the United States' decision. Will he clarify exactly what the Government's position really is? Does he not agree that, while Russia has undoubtedly breached its obligations under the treaty, it would be far better for the United States to remain within the auspices of the treaty and work to improve Russia's compliance?

**Gavin Williamson:** A treaty that involves only two people and is not being complied with by one of the parties does not end up as the most successful of treaties. That is why we will continue to work with our NATO allies, and with partners around the world, to put pressure on Russia to start complying with its international treaty responsibilities. The United States is quite right to highlight the fact that Russia is in breach of its obligations.

## Transition to Civilian Life

5. **David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support service personnel in making the transition to civilian life. [907802]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Every single year, 15,000 personnel depart from our armed forces, and I hope that I say on behalf of the entire House, "Thank you for your service." They learn incredible skills while serving, and we need to ensure that the transition back into civilian life is as smooth as possible. I am pleased to say that 90% of those who participate in our transition scheme are either in education or back in employment within six months of departing the armed forces.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Office for National Statistics, or the Registrar General for Scotland, about the feasibility of adding the category "armed forces veteran" to the national census, to help us to identify the location of our veterans?

**Mr Ellwood:** I am pleased to say that we have spoken to the National Audit Office, and we are proceeding with the census question to ensure that we have a better understanding of who is actually a veteran in this country. I think it would be very helpful in securing a better estimation. We understand that there are currently 2.5 million veterans, and that the figure will fall to 1.5 million over the next 10 years, but better data through the census will certainly help.

**Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** Does the Minister agree with me about the importance of the work done by small local charities, such as Hull Veterans Support Centre in Beverley Road, Hull, which works not only with the veterans, but with the family, and provide support, particularly at this time, around social security benefits and universal credit?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. When we think of the armed forces, we think of those in uniform, and when we think of the veterans, we think of those who have served, but around every person who has served there is a family—a unit that has been with them every step of the way—and we must make sure that their needs are looked after as well. I pay tribute to all the service-facing charities, including the small ones, that do such an excellent job. It is also important to recognise the work of the Veterans' Gateway that allows access to help with understanding where this support can be provided.

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con):** Sleeping rough or being homeless is always hard, particularly at this time of year, and I pay tribute to my charity Open Door, which helps people in such circumstances. What assessment has the Minister made about the number of former personnel who have trouble accessing housing and are finding themselves homeless this Christmas?

**Mr Ellwood:** This issue was raised in the debates on the veterans strategy that we had a couple of weeks ago and on the covenant. It is very important that all local authorities recognise their responsibility in meeting their

objectives for the covenant, and I encourage every hon. Member in this House to visit their local authority and ask who their armed forces champion is—who the person is who is supposed to be there to make sure we are meeting the objectives, which include looking after those requiring housing or needing help because they are homeless.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am sure the Minister is aware that the Secretary of State said recently that they are the armed forces shop steward, so I wonder why the Government disagree that armed forces personnel, including those transitioning into civilian life, would be better served by real shop stewards elected by an armed forces representative body.

**Mr Ellwood:** I put my hands up and say that we still need to work further on this—I made that clear in the debate as well—but the covenant is moving forward; we are holding other Government Departments to account, and I hope that will be made clearer when we report back on our findings next year.

#### Veterans' Mental Health and Armed Forces Covenant

6. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): When he last discussed the Government's obligations for the mental health of veterans and the Armed Forces Covenant with the Secretary of State for Health. [907803]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** We have regular discussions with the Department of Health and Social Care and, indeed, the Secretary of State for Health. As we just touched on, it is an important requirement that the health matters and the concerns of both veterans and armed forces personnel are met. That is not a direct responsibility of the MOD; it is a matter for the Department of Health and Social Care and we are working ever more closely with it.

**Mr Carmichael:** Further to the issue raised by the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), a UK veterans' assistance charity estimates that the number of armed forces veterans living homeless at present is in the region of 13,000. That is a figure that should give us all pause for thought, and should, I would suggest, cause us to unite politically rather to divide. Will the Minister speak to the health service, the councils and other Government Departments to get something done on this?

**Mr Ellwood** *rose*—

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It needs more than a champion.

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Gentleman shouts that it needs more than a champion; I invite him to go to his local authority and ask what it is doing about that. This is a matter that goes down to local authorities; they have responsibility. [Interruption.] The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) says that there are 13,000; we need to disaggregate between whether they are rough sleeping or homeless. In some cases there are places available, and often the veterans are not aware of the help that can be provided—and that is exactly where the armed forces champion comes into play.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Has the Minister assessed the impact on mental health of delays to appeal hearings for the armed forces compensation scheme?

**Mr Ellwood:** We are concerned about that. We do not want to see any delay in the allocation of armed forces compensation, and if the hon. Lady has a specific issue, I will be delighted to meet her to discuss it.

#### Armed Forces: Statutory Association Body

7. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): If the Government will award armed forces personnel the right to join a statutory association body. [907804]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will group this with Question 18.

Armed forces personnel are prohibited from joining any such lawful organisation. Personnel may become members of civilian trade unions and professional associations. If they are a member of a trade union, they cannot participate in any industrial action.<sup>1</sup>

**Mr Speaker:** I do not think the grouping had previously been requested, although I would not go to the wall over that, but in any case it cannot apply for the very good reason that Question 18 has been withdrawn. However, I daresay the Minister will bear that burden with stoicism and fortitude.

**Patrick Grady:** Does the Minister not recognise that we owe our current and former personnel a voice in the development of the policies that serve and support them, and that that is what a statutory representative body would do? Does he agree that, at the very least, the House should have an opportunity to fully debate this? Will he therefore ask the Leader of the House to make time for the Armed Forces Representative Body Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes)?

**Mr Ellwood:** I am obviously saddened that there is less time to debate this important issue right now, let alone on any future occasion. I want to make it clear that our armed forces prepare not for the world that we live in but for the world that we might find ourselves in. We are the ultimate backstop. We are the ones who step forward and fill the gaps when there is a necessity to do so. We cannot do that if there is a threat of industrial action or if we are in some way unable to provide those services. By all means bring that debate on; I will be more than happy to explain in more detail why the status quo is correct.

#### UK-EU Defence Relationship

8. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the UK's future defence relationship with the EU. [907805]

15. **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the UK's future defence relationship with the EU. [907812]

1. [Official Report, 28 November 2018, Vol. 650, c. 1MC.]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** All Ministry of Defence Ministers meet their EU counterparts regularly to discuss important matters of European security. I attended the October NATO defence ministerial meeting, which was also attended by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

**Mike Kane:** For the record, Manchester's armed forces champion is Councillor Tommy Judge, who was blown up twice by the IRA: once in the M62 bus bombing and once on the Falls Road. We know who are champions are. UK suppliers depend on just-in-time supply chains and therefore need frictionless trade. Does the Secretary of State agree that only a full customs union with the EU will ensure that?

**Gavin Williamson:** No, I do not.

**Mike Amesbury:** The Royal United Services Institute has concluded that the collapse in the value of the pound against the dollar following the Brexit vote could lead to additional costs of £700 million a year to the MOD. What is the Secretary of State's Department doing to mitigate this?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we always do is look at how we can drive efficiency through the Department, how we can do procurement better and how we can procure more of our future capabilities and equipment from the United Kingdom.

**Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** The withdrawal agreement would commit the UK to all the EU's state aid prevention rules without giving our defence industry any exemption from those rules. On what planet could we possibly support such a measure, which would destroy jobs across this nation and make our defence industry uncompetitive?

**Gavin Williamson:** We are looking to ensure that we have the freedom and independence that we need in terms of defence procurement, and that is integral to everything we are going to do. We will want to see whether there are options when it comes to having access to some programmes in the European Union, and if that works for Britain, we will consider it.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** The Prime Minister has said that the UK is unconditionally supportive of Europe's defence, and those of us on the SNP Benches welcome that, but the European Defence Agency has multiple associations for countries outside the European Union, including Norway and now Ukraine. Is it the Secretary of State's intention to explore such an association membership for the UK after we leave the European Union?

**Gavin Williamson:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be aware that Britain was involved in the security of continental Europe long before the creation of the European Union. We feel quite confident that the cornerstone of our security is NATO, not the European Union, and that is where our focus is going to be.

**Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab):** Last Thursday, I asked the Prime Minister what the cost would be of developing a British alternative to the Galileo project, given that she has failed to negotiate Britain's participation

in Galileo, post Brexit. I received absolutely no answer from her. The cost would in fact be between £3 billion and £5 billion. Given the support of the Defence Secretary for this move, will he tell me whether the Treasury has agreed to pay that sum?

**Gavin Williamson:** It is typical of the Labour party to want to hand over money continually to the European Union for nothing in return. When we look at the satellite technology, we see that it has been developed here in the UK with British money. We are more than capable of delivering the system with international allies. I hate to have to point it out to the hon. Gentleman, but there are more international allies around the globe than just the European Union, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, South Korea and many others we can work with.

### Departmental Funding

9. **Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907806]

16. **Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907813]

19. **Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the adequacy of funding for his Department. [907817]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** I hold regular discussions with the Chancellor. The additional £1.8 billion being invested in the defence budget reaffirms our commitment to protecting national security.

**Phil Wilson:** There is an additional £200 million for the Ministry of Defence this year, and £800 million the following year, but there is still a massive black hole to fill in the MOD budget. When will the Secretary of State stop asking for an inadequate bail-out and secure the finances that the MOD requires?

**Gavin Williamson:** Last year we saw £36 billion spent on defence, and next year we will see £39 billion, and we are investing £186 billion in defence procurement. We recognise that we have to look at how we make savings, which is why we have made £9.5 billion of efficiencies within our programme, to ensure that all three services get the equipment they need to safeguard the security of this nation.

**Louise Haigh:** The latest statistics show that Capita has managed to recruit only 10% of the officers and 7% of all other ranks that the Ministry requires for 2018-19. Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the adequacy of funding for recruiting the officers that the Ministry needs and with the performance of this failing provider?

**Gavin Williamson:** My understanding is that we are fully recruited for the officers. However, if the hon. Lady will allow me, I will write to her and confirm that that is the case.

**Wes Streeting:** The £1 billion from the Chancellor does not nearly make up for the £10 billion of real-terms cuts to the defence budget between 2010 and 2017. What more does the Secretary of State plan to do to ensure that his Department, and by extension our armed forces, are adequately resourced to tackle the emerging and changing threats facing our country?

**Gavin Williamson:** If we look at the choice between where Labour would take our defence policy and where we would take it, I know which would give Britain the greatest security. I think that all Government Members recognise the important role that our armed forces play, which is why we will keep investing in them.

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** The Government's calamitous failure to manage the defence budget means that the MOD's equipment plan is now completely unaffordable. The funding gap is somewhere between £7 billion and £15 billion. We all welcome the £1 billion that was earmarked for defence in the Budget, but the Secretary of State must realise that the sums just do not add up—unless, of course, he has been taking numeracy lessons from the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). Can he tell the House what urgent plans he has to deal with this particular funding shortfall?

**Gavin Williamson:** We recognise that we must always drive efficiency within our departmental budget, but we have the benefit of a rising budget and we are continuing to strive to make efficiencies within that, which is why we have made efficiencies of £9.5 billion.

**Nia Griffith:** I really do not think that the efficiencies argument washes anymore—it is just not good enough. We have known for years that the plan is unaffordable. Ministers must accept their responsibility for failing to balance the books. The National Audit Office has said that the Government must decide which programmes to defer, de-scope or delete as soon as possible, in order to bring the plan back into the black. One of the programmes that could be at risk is the Warrior capability sustainment programme, which is now 13 months behind schedule and £62 million over budget. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that this programme will not be cut in the modernising defence programme?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we actually see is the National Audit Office painting a worst-case scenario in terms of our equipment plan. What we continue to do, though, is to focus on driving efficiency. We are looking at investing in Warrior to make sure we can extend it out to 2040.

### Defence Arctic Strategy

10. **Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** When he plans to publish the Defence Arctic Strategy. [907807]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** As the House is aware, on 30 September we announced that the MOD would produce a UK Defence Arctic Strategy. Officials are developing the strategy now, in consultation with key stakeholders at home and away. We expect it to be published early next year.

**Alan Brown:** If we look at the here and now, the Defence Committee report, "On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic," confirms that the UK should focus more on its operability and presence in the Arctic. Right now, there are currently no Royal Navy vessels in Scottish waters and no indication of any resources being applied. Should not the Minister be doing more to protect Scottish waters?

**Mark Lancaster:** Let us be clear, there are lots of Royal Navy vessels in United Kingdom waters and, of course, any implementation of a Scottish strategy would be done within the realms of a United Kingdom strategy. I am pleased to say that earlier this year, for example, I visited HMS Trenchant on ICEX, in which it was the first British submarine in over 10 years to serve under the ice. Only this year we have had Royal Marines training in Norway. That will continue year on year, and they are training US marines. I am quite comfortable, and I am grateful for the Defence Committee's report, "On Thin Ice," as a result of which our activity is increasing.

**James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** I warmly congratulate the Government on recommitting the 800 Royal Marines who are to be trained in north Norway over a 10-year period. That training is world class; it is so good that we are training the US marines for cold weather. Does the Minister agree that not only is it first-class training but it is an extremely important strategic deterrent to Russia? Russia is only 200 miles away across an open border, where it has two brigades of ice-trained troops near Murmansk.

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. Indeed, only last week I was in Oslo for a meeting of the Northern Group of nations. Collectively, we looked very carefully at what we can do together to complement each other, and I can assure the House that our Royal Marines are playing a valuable part in that training.

### Defence Industry: Scotland

11. **Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to support the defence industry in Scotland. [907808]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** The Ministry of Defence spent nearly £1.6 billion with businesses in Scotland in 2016-17, supporting 10,500 jobs. I am personally delighted to see work progressing on the Type 26 on the Clyde, on the aircraft carriers at Rosyth and, of course, on the preparations for the new Dreadnought-class submarines at Faslane.

**Hugh Gaffney:** Scotland is one part of the UK that could benefit from the contract for the fleet solid support ships being awarded to a UK bidder. Research by the GMB union has found that, if the fleet solid support contract were placed with UK shipyards, it could create and secure up to 6,500 vital jobs—as has just been mentioned, the aircraft carriers at Rosyth are nearing completion. Is the Minister comfortable with the fact that his Department is following a plan that could undermine the creation of so many much-needed jobs like those at Rosyth?

**Stuart Andrew:** As I have said on many occasions, the fleet solid support ships are not classed as warships. There is no compelling national security reason to consider UK shipbuilding capacity as part of that procurement, but we are working very closely with industry, because we want it to become very competitive so that it not only attempts to win those contracts but is more successful with other contracts from around the world.

**Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con):** The SNP continues to sow uncertainty and create business risk by threatening a second independence referendum in Scotland. Will the Minister confirm to the House that such talk will not deter the Ministry of Defence from placing orders with Scottish companies?

**Stuart Andrew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the short time I have been in this role, I have spent a considerable amount of time in Scotland. I have been pleased to see the extent of the work and the fantastic achievement of the defence industry there, and long will that continue as far as we are concerned and are in charge of the MOD.

**Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP):** France classifies fleet solid support ships as “military”. Can the Minister explain why the UK does not?

**Stuart Andrew:** I am not going to comment on what other countries do.

### Outsourced Contracts

12. **Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the quality of service provided under outsourced departmental contracts. [907809]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** The MOD regularly monitors the performance of all its contractors, including outsourced services. That is carried out through the robust monitoring of contract performance indicators and taking action as appropriate where standards are not met.

**Mary Glendon:** Despite the fact that Capita has failed to fulfil its contract for Army recruitment, letting down both the Army and the taxpayer, the Government are now tendering to outsource veterans’ services as well. Does the Minister consider that the Government should be directly consulting and rewarding our veterans rather than multinational defence contractors who have proved time and again that they are incapable of delivering?

**Stuart Andrew:** I recognise there have been challenges in the Capita contract, but we are working closely with Capita on an improvement plan. We will always ensure that we do everything we can to support our veterans, and I know the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) will be working day in, day out to support that.

**Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab):** The Government’s ideological obsession with outsourcing MOD contracts to the private sector has led to appalling

service for personnel and families, poor value for money for the taxpayer and a worsening of terms and conditions for MOD workers. Many of the private companies that Hoover up these services are in a fragile state of affairs financially. Will the Minister therefore tell the House what possible justification the Department has for privatising veterans’ services, given that this contract is currently being delivered perfectly well in-house?

**Stuart Andrew:** We will always ensure that we get the very best for the people who have served in the armed forces and that we get value for money for the taxpayer, too. That is the responsible thing the Government should do.

### European Defence Co-operation

13. **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on strengthening defence co-operation. [907810]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** I hold regular discussions with my European counterparts on a wide range of issues, including strengthening defence co-operation. This is done not only through organisations such as NATO, but on a bilateral basis.

**Nigel Huddleston:** NATO has been at the heart of our efforts to ensure security and peace in Europe. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as we leave the EU, we will continue to be just as keen to participate in NATO, right alongside our European allies and friends?

**Gavin Williamson:** There is a misunderstanding that the European Union is the organisation that has delivered peace and security on the continent of Europe—we all know that for almost 70 years now that has been done by NATO, as my hon. Friend is right to point out. We will continue to liaise closely with all our partners, whether they are in the EU or not.

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** The Prime Minister has managed to unite the whole House in opposition to her half-baked Brexit deal, which, after two years of negotiations, is remarkably short on detail on our future relationship with the EU. One of the many questions that remains unanswered is the nature of our participation in the European defence fund, with just a cursory reference to it in the political declaration. This matters to the UK defence companies and research partners who want to have full access to the grants that the fund provides, so can the Secretary of State confirm that that will be the case?

**Gavin Williamson:** As I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, 90% of our collaboration with European countries is done not through the European Union, but on a bilateral basis. I imagine that is where the greatest amount of growth will be in the future. We have the option of being able to participate in the European defence fund, but it is not necessarily something we will choose to participate in.

### Royal Navy Surface Fleet

14. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the size of the Royal Navy surface fleet. [907811]

**Mr Speaker:** I suggest the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) seeks to piggy-back on this question, as that will aid the efficiency of our proceedings.

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** In the 2015 strategic defence and security review and the national shipbuilding strategy, the Government committed to maintaining a surface fleet of 19 frigates and destroyers. HMS Queen Elizabeth, a powerful expression of national ambition and intent, is now in service and will be joined by new submarines, frigates and patrol vessels.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Are we not desperately short of coastal defence vessels at a time when our borders and restored fishing grounds will need to be policed properly for the long term? If we ordered new such ships from British shipbuilders, we would secure thousands of jobs for the domestic economy and restore the strength of our vital coastal defences.

**Mark Lancaster:** The hon. Gentleman obviously missed the Secretary of State's announcement this week that we will be keeping the three batch 1 offshore patrol vessels.

17. [907814] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a balance be struck between asserting our right to free passage in international waters and not unnecessarily aggravating strategic partners? Does he agree that the Royal Navy should bear that in mind carefully when planning ship routes through the South China sea?

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I would like to think that we do find that balance. We have made three passages through the South China sea in recent months, and we are absolutely right to exercise our freedom of navigation rights.

### Armed Forces Recruitment

20. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to recruit personnel to the armed forces. [907818]

22. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage people to join the armed forces. [907820]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces. Importantly, the services continue to meet all their current commitments, keeping the country and its interests safe.

**Rachael Maskell:** In the light of the record 8,840 shortfall in armed forces personnel, most marked in the Army, which is a staggering 5,870 troops short, when will the Secretary of State recruit to the full quota of regular personnel?

**Mark Lancaster:** Let us be clear: our armed forces continue to meet all their operational commitments and remain at over 93% manned. We should put this into perspective. We are not complacent, and I am pleased to say that there are the early green shoots of recovery, with the number applying to join the armed forces at a record five-year high. We have to allow those people to work their way through the system.

**Tom Pursglove:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that young people need a mixture and variety of routes through which to succeed, not just traditional academic routes? How are armed forced opportunities presented to young people?

**Mark Lancaster:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I remain convinced that the armed forces continue to be an attractive proposition for young people. There are very few professions that someone can join with limited qualifications and leave with a level 6, degree-level apprenticeship.

### Topical Questions

T1. [907823] **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** Earlier this month, I visited British forces in Oman who are taking part in Saif Sareea 3, the largest western exercise this year, involving 70,000 personnel. As part of the same visit, I had the opportunity to visit HMS Albion, the Royal Navy's flagship, and to meet the crew, who have completed a 10-month mission. That crew and all those I met who were taking part in Saif Sareea 3 are an example of the hard work and determination of our armed forces, representing Britain around the globe.

**John Mc Nally:** In response to a freedom of information request, the Ministry of Defence revealed that as of 2 November 2018, 223 civilian MOD employees based in Scotland were receiving less than £8.75 an hour. Some 81.6% of Scottish workers earn the real living wage—now £9 an hour—which is the highest proportion in the UK. Would not an impartial observer ask why these 223 civilian staff are being treated differently?

**Gavin Williamson:** As a Department, we pay above the national minimum wage, and I am particularly proud of the fact that we are the largest employer of apprentices out of all organisations in the United Kingdom, employing more than 20,000 apprentices. I will certainly look into the matter that the hon. Gentleman raises and write back to him.

**Mr Speaker:** Brief questions, please. A sentence will suffice, I am sure.

T2. [907824] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Will the Secretary of State categorically reassure the House that the Government will stop forthwith handing over control of national security assets via the EU defence and procurement schemes?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew):** The UK remains unconditionally committed to European security by playing a leading

role in NATO and maintaining our strong transatlantic links. The UK will retain sovereign control over its armed forces. The agreement simply allows us to work together when we think that is in our best interests. That will only be as a third-party relationship, respecting the UK's sovereignty and the EU's autonomy.

**Mr Speaker:** A short sentence, please.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): As the UK is a signatory to the Budapest memorandum, what options are the Government considering in response to yesterday's aggressive actions by Russia against Ukraine in the sea of Azov?

**Gavin Williamson:** I think that I speak on behalf of the whole House when I say how shocked we were to see Russia's aggressive actions towards the Ukrainian navy. Just last week, I signed an agreement with my Ukrainian opposite number on how we can work closer together, and we will be having direct talks to discuss how we can offer assistance.

T4. [907827] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend look at refreshing the Heroes Return scheme for the next generation of veterans so that those who served in the Falklands, the first Gulf war and Kosovo have the same opportunities that my father did when he returned to Burma?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** Mr Speaker, I did not actually hear the question, but, unless my hon. Friend is able to repeat it, I would be delighted to meet her afterwards to discuss the matter further. All I heard was a reference to the Falkland Islands.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry, but there is probably a lesson there. It is quite a crowded House, so Members need to speak up a bit.

T5. [907829] **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): The latest families continuous attitude survey found that just three in 10 families in service family accommodation are satisfied with the quality of the work and maintenance. Does the Minister now accept that his Department has completely failed properly to oversee the contract with CarillionAmey?

**Mr Ellwood:** I half agree with the hon. Lady. We do need to improve standards. It is so important that we think about our armed forces. We should not only equip them well and train them well, but make sure that we house them well, and that is something towards which I shall continue to work.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his visit to the frontline in Donbass recently. In the light of the illegal seizure of the Ukrainian vessels yesterday, will he look to see what further support we can give to Ukraine?

**Gavin Williamson:** The whole world is in shock about what has happened, and I very much hope that this is something that can be looked at by the United Nations in terms of what action can be taken against Russia for displaying such aggressive behaviour against its neighbour.

T6. [907830] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): Even at this late stage, will the Minister commit himself to withdrawing the lucrative international tender for the fleet solid support ships, which will not only cost the British taxpayer millions, but cost British jobs as well?

**Stuart Andrew:** The national shipbuilding strategy is there so that we do everything we can to make sure that we have an industry that is competitive not just in this country, but across the globe, and that is exactly what we are trying to do. By getting the fleet solid support ships through international competition, we can secure a good price for the British taxpayer, too.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): The Poppy Appeal raised £49.2 million in 2017. Will the Minister take this opportunity to thank the hard-working poppy sellers up and down the country, including the incredible Gale Wood at the Morley branch in my constituency?

**Gavin Williamson:** We are all incredibly grateful to the many tens of thousands of volunteers up and down the country who give so much of their time for this great cause. The Royal British Legion has been doing it for generations now, and it will certainly always have our full support in what it does and the impact that it has on service personnel and veterans' lives.

T7. [907831] **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Industrial action started today at the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, where almost 300 skilled secure jobs are at risk despite the shipyard winning two large Ministry of Defence contracts worth £619 million. The GMB and Unite unions fear that this is about the casualisation of the workforce. At this late stage, what action will Ministers now take to save these jobs and get workers back to work, which is where they want to be?

**Stuart Andrew:** Obviously, it is disappointing to see that there is industrial action, and we are also concerned about job losses. This is why we were pleased to announce that £619 million contract as part of a number of ongoing contracts that we have been giving to UK shipyards around the country.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of the case of Gus Hales who has been on hunger strike outside Combat Stress in my constituency. What more can the Ministry of Defence do to work with Combat Stress to get Gus the help that he so badly needs?

**Mr Ellwood:** I have spoken to Gus Hales. I am very sorry about what has happened to him. I have also spoken to Combat Stress. We need to make sure that people such as Gus who have served this country are looked after. I will make sure that this is not repeated and, working with Combat Stress, make sure that his needs are looked after.

T8. [907832] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): In a previous Defence questions, I spoke about the need for BAE's Brough site to diversify its manufacturing in order to save jobs, and the Secretary of State told me that he had a meeting with

BAE. Will he please update me on that meeting, and agree to meet me and workers from BAE's Brough site to talk about how they can secure jobs for the future?

**Gavin Williamson:** The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), has met workers there. We had a very productive meeting with BAE Systems and the Qataris regarding the roll-out of the Hawk orders. I will write to the hon. Lady to update her.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that two years ago this month the MOD announced plans to close Royal Marines Barracks Chivenor. Will he come to the base with me to see for himself why it should remain open?

**Gavin Williamson:** My hon. Friend has been lobbying on behalf of RMB Chivenor over the last year. I will meet him to discuss this further, as he has been fighting a particularly strong campaign on the matter.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State said that he recently visited the Royal Navy's flagship, HMS Albion. Why is it that the Ministry of Defence defined it as a warship in 2009, but it is no longer defined as a warship in the 2017 national shipbuilding strategy?

**Stuart Andrew:** Excuse me a moment; I will try to answer the hon. Gentleman's question—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** It might not happen again, so I must advise the Minister that the Chief Whip is sitting underneath him and looking up at him.

**Stuart Andrew:** As I have said before, we now have a national shipbuilding strategy that is ensuring that our shipbuilding industry knows exactly what the MOD will be building over the next 30 years so that it can plan accordingly and be competitive in the world market. Surely, we should be welcoming that.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): May I give the Minister a second chance to answer the question that he could not hear earlier about veterans being given the opportunity to revisit the battlefields on which they have fought?

**Mr Ellwood:** It is important that we give veterans the opportunity to return to the battlefields. I think that my right hon. Friend is referring to a return to the Falklands. I will endeavour to see what can be done, and whether we can use the air bridge to allow veterans to return to that battle place.

## Leaving the EU

3.32 pm

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the conclusion of our negotiations—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Shannon, sort out your seating arrangements—well done. A long afternoon lies ahead, so let us have a bit of quiet and respectful order for the Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister:** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the conclusion of our negotiations to leave the European Union.

At yesterday's special European Council in Brussels, I reached a deal with the leaders of the other 27 EU member states on a withdrawal agreement that will ensure our smooth and orderly departure on 29 March next year; and, tied to this agreement, a political declaration on an ambitious future partnership that is in our national interest. This is the right deal for Britain because it delivers on the democratic decision of the British people. It takes back control of our borders, and ends the free movement of people in full once and for all, allowing the Government to introduce a new skills-based immigration system. It takes back control of our laws; it ends the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK and instead means our laws being made in our Parliaments, enforced by our courts. It takes back control of our money, ending the vast annual payments that we send to Brussels, so that we can instead spend taxpayers' money on our own priorities, including the £394 million a week of extra investment into our long-term plan for the national health service.

By creating a new free trade area with no tariffs, fees, charges, quantitative restrictions or rules of origin checks, this deal protects jobs, including those that rely on integrated supply chains. It protects our security, with a close relationship on defence and on tackling crime and terrorism, which will help to keep all our people safe. It also protects the integrity of our United Kingdom, meeting our commitments in Northern Ireland and delivering for the whole UK family, including our overseas territories and the Crown dependencies.

On Gibraltar, we have worked constructively with the Governments of Spain and Gibraltar. I want to pay tribute, in particular, to Gibraltar's Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, for his statesmanship in these negotiations. We have ensured that Gibraltar is covered by the whole withdrawal agreement and by the implementation period. And for the future partnership, the UK Government will be negotiating for the whole UK family, including Gibraltar. As Fabian Picardo said this weekend:

"Every aspect of the response of the United Kingdom was agreed with the Government of Gibraltar. We have worked seamlessly together in this as we have in all other aspects of this two year period of negotiation. Most importantly, the legal text of the draft Withdrawal Agreement has not been changed. That is what the Spanish Government repeatedly sought. But they have not achieved that. The United Kingdom has not let us down."

Our message to the people of Gibraltar is clear: we will always stand by you. We are proud that Gibraltar is British, and our position on sovereignty has not and will not change.

The withdrawal agreement will ensure that we leave the European Union on 29 March next year in a smooth and orderly way. It protects the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and UK citizens living in the EU, so they can carry on living their lives as before. It delivers a time-limited implementation period to give business time to prepare for the new arrangements. During the implementation period, trade will continue on current terms so businesses only have to face one set of changes. It ensures a fair settlement of our financial obligations—less than half of what some originally expected and demanded. It meets our commitment to ensure there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland—and also no customs border in the Irish sea—in the event that the future relationship is not ready by the end of the implementation period.

I know that some Members remain concerned that we could find ourselves stuck in this backstop, so let me address this directly. First, this is an insurance policy that no one wants to use. Both the UK and the EU are fully committed to having our future relationship in place by 1 January 2021, and the withdrawal agreement has a legal duty on both sides to use best endeavours to avoid the backstop ever coming into force. If, despite this, the future relationship is not ready by the end of 2020, we would not be forced to use the backstop. We would have a clear choice between the backstop or a short extension to the implementation period. If we did choose the backstop, the legal text is clear that it should be temporary and that the article 50 legal base cannot provide for a permanent relationship. And there is now more flexibility that it can be superseded either by the future relationship, or by alternative arrangements which include the potential for facilitative arrangements and technologies to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland.

There is also a termination clause, which allows the backstop to be turned off when we have fulfilled our commitments on the Northern Ireland border. And there is a unilateral right to trigger a review through the Joint Committee and the ability to seek independent arbitration if the EU does not use good faith in this process. Furthermore, as a result of the changes we have negotiated, the legal text is now also clear that once the backstop has been superseded, it shall "cease to apply". So if a future Parliament decided to then move from an initially deep trade relationship to a looser one, the backstop could not return.

I do not pretend that either we or the EU are entirely happy with these arrangements. And that is how it must be—were either party entirely happy, that party would have no incentive to move on to the future relationship. But there is no alternative deal that honours our commitments to Northern Ireland which does not involve this insurance policy. And the EU would not have agreed any future partnership without it. Put simply, there is no deal that comes without a backstop, and without a backstop there is no deal.

The withdrawal agreement is accompanied by a political declaration that sets out the scope and terms of an ambitious future relationship between the UK and the EU. It is a detailed set of instructions to negotiators that will be used to deliver a legal agreement on our future relationship after we have left. The linkage clause between the withdrawal agreement and the declaration requires both sides to use best endeavours to get this

legal text agreed and implemented by the end of 2020, and both sides are committed to making preparations for an immediate start to the formal negotiations after our withdrawal.

The declaration contains specific detail on our future economic relationship. That includes a new free trade area with no tariffs, fees, quantitative restrictions or rules of origin checks—an unprecedented economic relationship that no other major economy has. It includes liberalisation in trade in services well beyond World Trade Organisation commitments and building on recent EU free trade agreements. It includes new arrangements for our financial services sector, ensuring that market access cannot be withdrawn on a whim and providing stability and certainty for our world-leading industry. And it ensures that we will leave EU programmes that do not work in our interests. So we will be out of the common agricultural policy, which has failed our farmers, and out of the common fisheries policy, which has failed our coastal communities.

Instead, as the political declaration sets out, we will be “an independent coastal state” once again. We will take back full sovereign control over our waters, so we will be able to decide for ourselves who we allow to fish in our waters. The EU has maintained throughout this process that it wanted to link overall access to markets to access to fisheries. It failed in the withdrawal agreement and it failed again in the political declaration. It is no surprise that some are already trying to lay down markers again for the future relationship, but they should be getting used to the answer by now: it is not going to happen.

Finally, the declaration is clear that whatever is agreed in the future partnership must recognise the development of an independent UK trade policy beyond this economic partnership. For the first time in 40 years, the UK will be able to strike new trade deals and open up new markets for our goods and services in the fastest growing economies around the world.

As I set out for the House last week, the future relationship also includes a comprehensive new security partnership, with close reciprocal law enforcement and judicial co-operation to keep all our people safe. At the outset we were told that, being outside of free movement and outside of the Schengen area, we would be treated like any other non-EU state on security. But this deal delivers the broadest security partnership in the EU’s history, including arrangements for effective data exchange on passenger name records, DNA, fingerprints and vehicle registration data, as well as extradition arrangements like those in the European arrest warrant. And it opens the way to sharing the types of information included in the European criminal records information system and Schengen information system II databases on wanted or missing persons and criminal records.

This has been a long and complex negotiation. It has required give and take on both sides, and that is the nature of a negotiation. But this deal honours the result of the referendum, while providing a close economic and security relationship with our nearest neighbours, and in so doing, offers a brighter future for the British people outside of the EU. And I can say to the House with absolute certainty that there is not a better deal available—[*Interruption.*] My fellow leaders were very clear on that yesterday.

Our duty as a Parliament over these coming weeks is to examine this deal in detail, to debate it respectfully, to listen to our constituents and to decide what is in our national interest. There is a choice which this House will have to make. We can back this deal, deliver on the vote of the referendum and move on to building a brighter future of opportunity and prosperity for all our people, or the House can choose to reject this deal and go back to square one. No one knows what would happen if this deal does not pass. It would open the door to more division and more uncertainty, with all the risks that will entail.

I believe our national interest is clear. The British people want us to get on with a deal that honours the referendum and allows us to come together again as a country, whichever way we voted. This is that deal—a deal that delivers for the British people. I commend this statement to the House.

3.44 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the advance copy of her statement.

The Prime Minister may want to try to sell yesterday’s summit as a great success, but, to borrow a phrase, the reality is “nothing has changed”. She says that, if we reject this deal, it will take us back to square one. The truth is that, under this Government, we have never got beyond square one. The botched deal is a bad deal for this country, and all yesterday did was mark the end of this Government’s failed and miserable negotiations.

There can be no doubt that this deal would leave us with the worst of all worlds—no say over future rules and no certainty for the future. Even the Prime Minister’s own Cabinet cannot bring themselves to sell this deal. The Foreign Secretary said yesterday:

“This deal...mitigates most of the negative impacts”.

That is hardly a glowing endorsement. The silence from much of the rest of the Cabinet is telling. They know that these negotiations have failed and they know it will leave Britain worse off. In fact, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research confirmed that today, saying that the Prime Minister’s deal would mean our economy would be 3.9% smaller than it would otherwise be. This is more than our net contribution to the European Union, which is currently £8.9 billion a year—about £170 million per week. So why is the Prime Minister claiming that extra money to the NHS will be due to the Brexit dividend? Of course, we look forward to the official Treasury forecasts, and indeed the legal advice that this House voted to see nearly two weeks ago.

The Prime Minister’s claim that this deal takes back control over our borders, money and laws is, frankly, a fallacy. The reality is the opposite. She says that the political declaration should give us comfort that the Northern Ireland backstop will not be needed. But, in June 2020, this country will be faced with a stark choice: we can agree to extend the transition period, or accept the backstop. So can the Prime Minister confirm that, under her deal, if we are to avoid the backstop, we will have to accept whatever the European Union demands to extend the transition period—leaving a choice of paying more money without a say on the rules, or entering a backstop leading to a regulatory border down the Irish sea? So much for taking back control of our borders, money and laws.

[Jeremy Corbyn]

It may not end there. The President of France, President Macron, has already made clear what his priorities will be in negotiating Britain a future deal. On Sunday he said:

“We will concentrate our efforts in order to obtain access to the British waters before the end of the transition period. And of course all of our fishermen will be protected.”

Is it not the case that, under the Prime Minister’s botched deal, we will have to agree to those demands on access to waters and quota shares if we want to finalise a future trade deal or extend the transition—breaking every promise the Prime Minister, the Environment Secretary and the Scotland Secretary have made to our fishing industry and our coastal communities?

There was another climbdown over Gibraltar at the weekend. Is it not the case that Spain now has a role over Gibraltar benefiting from any future relationship? That is still to be negotiated, not something the Prime Minister presented to the Commons last week.

In two weeks’ time, this House will begin voting on a legally binding withdrawal agreement and the vague wish list contained in the political declaration. The Prime Minister would be negotiating that future agreement from a position of profound weakness—threatened with paying more to extend the transition, with no say over our money, laws or borders, and at risk of the utterly unacceptable backstop, which was only made necessary by her own red lines, most of which have since been abandoned by her. Is it in the national interest for the Prime Minister to plough on when it is clear that this deal does not have the support of either side of this House or the country as a whole? Ploughing on is not stoic; it is an act of national self-harm. Instead of threatening this House with a no-deal scenario or a no-Brexit scenario, the Prime Minister now needs to prepare a plan B—something her predecessors failed to do. There is a sensible deal—[*Interruption.*] There is a sensible deal that could win the support of this House, based—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. When the Prime Minister was addressing the House, I made it clear that she should be heard, and by and large she was. To those chuntering or yelling from a sedentary position, I say stop it—it is rude, foolish and doomed to fail.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

There is a sensible deal that could win the support of this House, based on a comprehensive customs union and a strong single market deal that protects rights at work and environmental safeguards.

The Prime Minister may have achieved agreement across 27 Heads of State, but she has lost the support of the country. Many young people and others see opportunities being taken away from them. Many people who voted remain voted for an outward-looking and inclusive society, and they fear this deal and the Prime Minister’s rhetoric in promoting it. Likewise, many people from areas that voted leave feel this deal has betrayed the Brexit they voted for—that it does not take back control, will not make them better off and will not solve the economic deprivation that affects far too many communities, towns and cities across this country.

This deal is not a plan for Britain’s future; so, for the good of the nation, the House has very little choice but to reject it.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman asked where the Brexit dividend was. We have been very clear that we will be able to use the money we are not sending to the EU to spend on our priorities, including the national health service. There was a time when he himself talked of spending the Brexit dividend on our public services. He talks about the backstop and about the implementation period being the alternative. Actually, no, we have written in the possibility of alternative arrangements. The key thing is to deliver on our commitment of no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland—a commitment that he appeared to dismiss in his response to my statement. We do not dismiss the people of Northern Ireland. We believe it is important to maintain that commitment.

The right hon. Gentleman said that our deal did not bring back control of our borders, but of course it does because it brings an end to free movement once and for all. I note that the Labour party has never been able to stand up and actually say it wants to bring an end to free movement once and for all, and that is because it is not responding to the real needs and concerns of the British people on these issues. The British people want control of our borders and an end to free movement, and this deal delivers it.

I was very interested to hear that it now appears to be Labour party policy to be in both the single market and the customs union. [*Interruption.*] I hear yeses from the Labour Front Bench. There was a time when the right hon. Gentleman talked about the importance of an independent trade policy and negotiating our own trade deals. As a full member of the customs union, in which he wants us to remain, we cannot do that, so again he has gone back on his words in relation to these issues.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about President Macron’s comments about access to waters. I recognise that this has raised a question about our being in the backstop. For the benefit of all those who are concerned, and all those who have commented on this, it is important to recall that if we were in the backstop, we would be outside the common fisheries policy and we would be deciding who had access to fish in our waters.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Gibraltar. I quoted the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, who made it very clear, as I did, that this Government stood by Gibraltar and resisted changes to the withdrawal agreement that the Spanish Government wished to make. We are clear that Gibraltar’s sovereignty will not change. It has not changed and will not change. We are proud that Gibraltar is British.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman talked about dealing with issues with our economy in those parts of the country where we need to enhance and improve our economy. It is absolutely clear that the one thing that will never deliver for our economy is his policy on borrowing, taxing and spending. It is a balanced approach to the economy that delivers.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I recognise my right hon. Friend’s genuine endeavours in all these matters, but may I return her to the point about the backstop? Does she recognise the

genuine concern held in all parts of the House about what would happen if the UK were to be forced into the backstop? I listened very carefully to her statement, and she said that the UK does not want it and the EU does not want it; we heard the other day that Ireland said that, no matter what agreement was reached, it would never have any hard border. It makes one wonder why it is in the withdrawal agreement at all.

My question for my right hon. Friend is this: if the Government, going down the road to a negotiation, are heading toward that point when the backstop is invoked, does that not mean that Mr Macron is right and we will come under intolerable pressure to agree to almost anything to avoid our entry into what my right hon. Friend rightly says is something we never want to be in?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the depth of concern that there has been and that remains for some Members of this House about the issue of the backstop, but I disagree with my right hon. Friend about the position that would entail. As I indicated in my statement, largely thanks to my right hon. Friend and our right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), we are in the position of having within the withdrawal agreement the recognition that there could be alternative arrangements to the backstop, or the extension of the implementation period, that would deliver for the border of Northern Ireland.

While I recognise the depth of concern that this is not a situation that the UK wants to be in, nor is it a situation that the European Union wants us to be in. That is because—strange though it may seem to some Members of this House—there are members of the European Union who actively think that the backstop would be a good place for the UK because of its access to the EU markets without having financial obligations and without free movement. That is why they do not want us to be in the backstop either. Neither of us wants to invoke it—the Taoiseach has been clear about that. We want to ensure that the future relationship replaces it and delivers our commitment to the people of Northern Ireland.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The Prime Minister's deal means that Scotland is to be taken out of the European Union against our will, and out of the single market—a market that is about eight times the size of the UK's. Scotland voted to remain; our rights must be respected. Leaving will rip away jobs, hit living standards and end freedom of movement—something that will make it harder for our precious NHS to attract and retain the staff that we need. Migration has been good for Scotland. The Prime Minister talks about queue-jumpers from Europe—an outrageous slur against EU citizens who come here—but blatantly disregards the rights that we will all lose to live and work in Europe. We are not prepared to give up those rights.

The Prime Minister's deal carries no majority in this House and has split those on her own Benches. It means that a blindfold Brexit is now certain. There is no long-term agreement on our trading relationship with Europe; it is a deal full of ifs and buts. Crucially, here we are again with another sell-out of the Scottish fishing industry by a Tory Government. We have been here before: we were sold out by Ted Heath and we have been sold out repeatedly by Tory Governments. Under this agreement, fishing boats registered in Northern

Ireland would continue to gain zero-tariff access to the EU and UK markets, but fishing boats registered in Scotland and other parts of the UK would not.

We now know that the EU will start negotiations based on existing quota shares. That is not taking back control of our waters; it is the EU exercising an effective veto. Scottish fishing communities have been duped once again by the Conservatives. The Scottish National party will not—we cannot—accept this sell-out by the Conservatives. I call upon the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to search their consciences, because their fingerprints are all over this.

The agreed declaration states that the transition period after leaving the EU could be extended by one or two years. Does the Prime Minister accept that that means that the UK would almost certainly be in the CFP with no voting rights for another one or two years, totally contrary to what the Scottish Secretary has said? The Prime Minister says the deal ends uncertainty. It does not end uncertainty for Scotland's fishing sector or for the future state of the economy, which faces years of turbulence in a bureaucratic tangle.

There is talk of a Brexit TV debate. Will the Prime Minister debate with the First Minister of Scotland? The ways that Scotland's interests have been dismissed by the UK Government throughout this process demonstrate the real cost of not being an independent country able to take our own decisions. The day will come when Scotland will be an independent country. We on the Scottish National party Benches will continue to work across parties to put in place a deal that works for Scotland and we will support another referendum on EU membership.

**The Prime Minister:** I will address the right hon. Gentleman's two main points. Once again he gave most of his comments over to the question of fishing, but he mentioned migration. It is important that we deliver on what people voted for in the referendum. They voted for an end to free movement. That is because they felt it was not right that people had a right to come here and were freely able to move here based on the country they came from rather than their contribution to the United Kingdom. We will be able to put in place a skills-based immigration system that is based on people's skills and their contribution to our economy.

The right hon. Gentleman devoted the majority of his comments to the common fisheries policy. He talked about a sell-out of Scottish fishermen. The real sell-out of Scottish fishermen is the SNP's policy to stay in a common fisheries policy. Who has been standing up for Scottish fishermen in this House? Conservative Scottish Back Benches have been. All the SNP wants to do is stay in the common fisheries policy and that would indeed be a sell-out of Scottish fishermen.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): If the European Union really intends in good faith to rapidly negotiate a future trade agreement, why can we not make the second half of the £39 billion payment conditional on delivering it?

**The Prime Minister:** As my right hon. Friend is aware from the early negotiations that we held on this particular issue, the £39 billion has been determined in relation to

[The Prime Minister]

our legal obligations. I think it is important that as a country we stand up to our legal obligations. As my right hon. Friend will also know, there is a timetable for these payments spread over a period of time. A key element is ensuring that we are able to have that implementation period, which is so important for our businesses, so that they have only to make one set of changes and that there is a smooth and orderly withdrawal.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): By refusing to make choices now about our future economic relationship with the European Union, what the Prime Minister has done is put off that moment to a time when the EU will have much greater leverage over this country, because any future trade agreement will require the unanimous approval of every European member state. How can the Prime Minister expect the House to vote to put the country in such a weak position? Is that not the biggest failure of the negotiation?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman, I am sure, is very well aware of the position that the European Union is not able sign a trade agreement. We are looking for that free trade area being at the heart of our economic partnership for the future. The European Union is not able to sign that and develop the legal text for that until we are a third country and have withdrawn from the EU. Far from not setting out details of our future relationship, the political declaration does just that. It makes it very clear that this is the set of, if you like, instructions to the negotiators that the future relationship will put into place what is in the political declaration.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): As it currently stands, the majority of hon. and right hon. Members in this place will not vote in favour of the Prime Minister's deal, despite her very best efforts, so she needs plan B. What is the Prime Minister's plan B? Is it "Norway plus"—the single market, the customs union—for which some of us have been arguing for over two years?

**The Prime Minister:** I am tempted to say to my right hon. Friend that throughout the last 18 months of negotiations, at virtually every stage people have said to me that it was not going to be possible for me to negotiate a deal with the European Union. No sooner do I negotiate a deal with the European Union than people are saying, "Well, what's the next thing you're going to do with the European Union?" In all seriousness, I say to my right hon. Friend that we will have a number of days of debate in this Chamber prior to the meaningful vote on this deal. I believe it is important that when people look at this deal and come to that vote, they consider the interests of this country and the interests of their constituents, and they consider the importance of delivering on Brexit.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): Now that the Prime Minister has decided to launch a public debate on her plans, should she not move beyond her comfort zone of debating with Brexit fellow travellers like the leader of the Labour party and engage with the much larger cross-party coalition in favour of a people's vote, with the option of remaining in the European Union? Will she not debate with the real opposition?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have asked me this question about the people's vote—the second referendum—on a number of occasions, and my answer to that has not changed. I believe that it is important, having given the choice to the British people as to whether we stay in the European Union, that we now deliver on the choice that the British people made. That is a difference of opinion between myself and him—I recognise that—but I think that the majority of the British public want us to get on with doing what they asked us to do.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Does the Prime Minister appreciate that the withdrawal agreement is incompatible with the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which expressly repeals the whole of the European Communities Act 1972? In this event, we would truly regain our laws. Does the Prime Minister accept that this agreement, being only a treaty, cannot override the statutory provisions of the 2018 Act, and is therefore unlawful? Did she seek the legal opinion of the Attorney General on this question in good time before the agreement was signed by her yesterday, as required under the ministerial code?

**The Prime Minister:** I make two points to my hon. Friend. First, one of the things that the European Union (Withdrawal) Act does is bring European Union law into UK law, such that there is that smooth and orderly transition when we leave the European Union, and, of course, the withdrawal agreement will be implemented in our legislation through the withdrawal agreement Act.

**Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): The Prime Minister says in her statement that "the legal text is now also clear that once the backstop has been superseded, it shall 'cease to apply'". We need accuracy—actually, on page 309, article 2, on the Northern Ireland protocol, it says the backstop can be superseded

"in whole or in part"

and

"shall cease to apply...in whole or in part."

We need accuracy, because it is the legal text that matters, and that is what will bind the country. As the Chancellor has rightly said that the backstop is bad for the Union and bad for the economy—that is what he has said—can she tell us what bits are so bad for the Union?

**The Prime Minister:** The parts of the backstop that are bad for the European Union—

**Nigel Dodds:** For the United Kingdom.

**The Prime Minister:** Oh, sorry—for the United Kingdom. What we want to be able to do in the future is to have our independent trade policy. One of the issues in relation to the backstop is whether or not we would be able to do that—that is one of the issues that we would not want to see us continuing to be in the backstop for.

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on beginning her campaign to sell this deal to the country with a frank admission, just now, that it is unsatisfactory. I think

that that is a bit of an understatement. It is hard to see how the deal can provide certainty for business or for anyone else, given that half the Cabinet are going around reassuring business that the UK will effectively remain in a customs union and in a single market, while the Prime Minister herself is continuing to say that we are going to take back control of our laws, vary our tariffs, and do—as she said just now—real free trade deals. They cannot both be right. Which is it?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me first point out to my right hon. Friend that what I said in my statement was that neither we nor the EU were entirely happy with the backstop arrangements that were put in place. That is accurate. I have referenced one reason why we are not happy with it, and I have referenced in earlier answers why the EU is not happy with it.

I recognise the concern that has been expressed about our ability to negotiate free trade deals with other countries on the basis of the arrangement that we are putting in place with the EU for our future relationship. We will be able to negotiate those free trade deals, but I think every Member of the House should be aware that when they are being considered, there will be issues that the House will want to consider, which will be nothing to do with whether or not we have a particular relationship with the European Union. The House will want to consider animal welfare standards. The House will want to consider environmental standards. Those are the issues that Members will wish to consider when it looks at the free trade deals, but it is absolutely clear that we will be able to negotiate those deals with the relationship that is being proposed.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): This is not a deal for the future; it is just a stopgap. We do not know whether it means Chequers, or Canada, or Norway, or an endless backstop, or something worse, or a massive security downgrade. We have no idea where this is heading, and other countries are already saying that this gives them more leverage because it reduces our negotiating power. How can the Prime Minister say that this is in the future interests of the country? She used to say that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. When did she change her mind?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me point out to the right hon. Lady that what the political declaration does is set out very clearly the basis for the future relationship that we will be having with the European Union in respect of security and economic arrangements. It also sets out clearly that

“it is the clear intent of both Parties to develop in good faith agreements giving effect to this relationship”.

This is not about some other sort of relationship; it is about what is in this document.

The right hon. Lady asked whether it was Canada or Norway. I said right at the beginning of this process that we should get away from thinking of “on the shelf” models that already exist. What is being proposed here, and what is acknowledged from the European Union, is a relationship of unprecedented depth which has not been offered to any other major advanced economy. It is a relationship which shows that we are not just another third country.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Prime Minister agree that this agreement could cost a lot more than £39 billion—as there are no cash limits or figures in it, and plenty of liabilities—especially if the EU goes as slowly on the next phase of the negotiations as it did on the last lot, and drags us into permanent transition at enormous cost?

**The Prime Minister:** As my right hon. Friend will know, there are clauses in the withdrawal agreement in relation to the endeavours that both sides will make to reach agreement by the end of the implementation period in December 2020 which make it clear that action can be taken if either side drags its feet in the way that he is talking about.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister is not suggesting that, compared with staying in the European Union, her Brexit proposals would mean that our country would be economically better off, is she?

**The Prime Minister:** The question of our future—*[Interruption.]* No. I believe that we can be economically better off outside the European Union. The problem is that there are those who think the only factor that determines how well off we are in the future is whether or not we are a member of the European Union. I differ. Our future is in our hands. It will be our decisions, in many areas, that will determine our prosperity for the future.

**Sir Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Nobody can now doubt that the Prime Minister has tried her very best. Are we not none the less being asked to take a huge gamble here: paying, leaving, surrendering our vote and our veto without any firm commitment to frictionless trade or the absolute right to dismantle external tariffs? Is it really wise to trust the future of our economy to a pledge simply to use best endeavours?

**The Prime Minister:** The position on the nature of the political declaration is exactly what I set out in response to the question from the Chairman of the Exiting the European Union Committee, which is that it is not possible for us to sign that legal treaty on a free trade agreement with the European Union until we are outside the European Union.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Prime Minister was told very clearly last November that any backstop would not be tenable and would not be acceptable, yet she has carried on with allowing it to be put in. But not only is it in; it is in in a way that we cannot get out of unless the EU allows us to do so. Does the Prime Minister agree that that is not really giving back sovereignty to our country—to the people who voted to leave?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said in my statement, the position is very simple: there is no withdrawal agreement without a backstop. Without a backstop there is no deal. That is because of the commitment that both sides wanted to give to the people of Northern Ireland to ensure there was no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. That is very simple; any other arrangement—any other agreement on trade with the European Union—would have a backstop.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): The Brexit debate has seen false promises made to the public from all sides and from all parties. Democracy only works when it can be based on a debate of truth, honesty and fact. How can the Prime Minister reassure the House that this debate we are about to have now on her deal is based on facts and evidence, not more false promises to the British people, which when broken subsequently will damage trust in our democracy even more?

**The Prime Minister:** I say to my right hon. Friend that we are committed as a Government to publishing analysis of this deal; we will publish analysis of the various aspects of this deal. As my right hon. Friend is aware, there are others out there looking at the economic aspects as well. I am tempted to say this, however: she asked whether this can be based on facts; I think it would be interesting for this House to debate the extent to which economic forecasts can be described as facts.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): May I thank the Prime Minister for the efforts she made personally on behalf of my constituent Matthew Hedges, who has been released this morning? That is a bit of good news amidst all this Brexit mess. But on Brexit, if she is so confident that the public support this deal, why does she not ask them?

**The Prime Minister:** May I first thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks about his constituent?

I have responded before to questions about the second referendum issue, and it is very simple: I think that it is absolutely right that this House and politicians should see it as a duty to implement the vote the British people gave to leave the European Union.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): When my right hon. Friend describes the functioning of her free trade area, it sounds awfully like a comprehensive customs union. Can she be absolutely clear where we are headed? Will we never reach the point where there are customs declarations?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is well aware of the position the Government take, which is that we will be working for frictionless trade. As he will see, the references in the political declaration are to an ambitious agreement in relation to the restriction of checks, but my hon. Friend will also be aware that obviously there is a balance between the rights in terms of frictionless access and the obligations. That is clearly set out in the document. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government set out their position in the summer in the White Paper.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Prime Minister says that a majority of people want her to get on with Brexit, but actually that is not true. It might be an inconvenient fact, but the truth is that the majority want a people's vote. So when she is giving her tour around the country—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady is entitled to ask her question without being consistently shouted at. I thought we were talking about respect in the Chamber. Try remembering that—*[Interruption.]* Well, maybe the person who says, “Were we?” does not care about that, but most of us do, and I want to hear the hon. Lady and the response to the hon. Lady.

**Caroline Lucas:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. We have heard that the Prime Minister is planning to tour the country to sell her bungled deal to the public. Why does she not try listening to the public? Rather than having a stage-managed opportunity just to hear a whole load of waffle, why cannot people have a chance to have their say in a people's vote? If she really trusted them, she would do this.

**The Prime Minister:** I answered the question on the people's vote earlier. I do listen to the public, and when I go knocking on doors and listening to what people say, the overwhelming view is that we should get on with it and do what the vote said.

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): The Conservative manifesto at the last election promised to deliver the leave vote by leaving the single market, leaving the customs union and leaving the remit of the European Court of Justice. Many of us, endorsed by experienced lawyers, believe that this document does not deliver that. It is also a clear breach of the principle of consent of the Belfast agreement, and it is going to cost us £39 billion. Given that a majority across the House, including myself, intend to vote against this deal, will the Prime Minister acknowledge at this late stage that the obstacle to President Tusk's offer of a free trade deal was the problem of the Northern Irish border? In her political declaration, she has acknowledged that current techniques and processes could sort that. Will she therefore please at this late stage look to a comprehensive free trade deal, with our solution to the Northern Ireland border?

**The Prime Minister:** At the heart of this political declaration and of our future economic partnership is a comprehensive free trade deal. It is just a better comprehensive free trade deal than Canada.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): In the Prime Minister's lexicon, is “smooth and orderly” the new “strong and stable”?

**The Prime Minister:** A smooth and orderly exit is what business wants and I am sure what citizens up and down this country want.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Prime Minister, there is one thing on which we can all agree. It is that when we come to vote on this in two weeks' time, it will be about the most important thing that we in this House will ever vote on in our entire lives. *The Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph* have described the deal this morning as a “surrender”, and I am afraid it is. As soon as the ink is dry, the Spanish will be after Gibraltar and the French will be after our fish—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let me say to Members around the right hon. Gentleman, including some who fondly imagine they are going to be called to ask a question: do not sit there heckling your colleague. He has a right to be heard. If you do not like it, listen with courtesy and in silence and, if it is that bad for you, you are welcome to leave the Chamber. The right hon. Gentleman will be heard. Amen. End of subject.

**Mr Francois:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister and the whole House know the mathematics. This will never get through. Even if it did—which it will

not—the Democratic Unionist party Members on whom we rely for a majority have said that they would then review the confidence and supply agreement. So it is as dead as a dodo. Prime Minister, I plead with you: the House of Commons has never, ever surrendered to anybody, and it will not start now.

**The Prime Minister:** I should like to reassure my right hon. Friend. As I referenced in my statement on Gibraltar, the United Kingdom has not surrendered in those matters to which he has referred. He talked about the Spanish position on Gibraltar, but the Spanish have always held that position on Gibraltar. He talked about the French wanting our fish, but as he will know, French fishermen have long been wanting to fish in our waters, and they have done so. What they wanted to do in the political declaration was to link that access to our waters with our access to markets in relation to trade. We resisted that, we continue to resist it, and we resisted it in the document itself. We will continue to resist it, and we will continue to stand by the people of Gibraltar.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister deserves some sympathy for having to front up for that divided mob behind her. Earlier she said, “It isn’t going to happen,” but the fact of the matter is that she is not going to get a majority in this House for the deal, because it would leave the British people worse off. Concern is growing and many of my constituents want us to assert parliamentary supremacy, which she mentioned in her Lancaster House speech. Let us get back into the European Union, where people will get a better deal at the end of the day.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman talks about parliamentary supremacy. Of course, it was this Parliament that decided by an overwhelming majority to ask the British people for their view on our membership of the European Union. They voted and gave that view, and I believe that it is our duty to deliver on it.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): May I first thank my right hon. Friend for making three statements to the House of Commons in 10 days, which I think is a Boycottian achievement? In answer to an earlier question, she said that we have a legal obligation to pay £39 billion. I wonder whether she is forgetting the report of the House of Lords of March 2017, which stated that in the event of leaving without a deal, we would owe no money at all. Therefore, what are we buying with £39 billion of taxpayers’ money?

**The Prime Minister:** I can assure my hon. Friend that I have not forgotten the House of Lords report, but there is a different opinion, which is that there are legal obligations that this country would hold to the European Union in relation to financial payments in any circumstances. As I have said before, I think that it is important that this country upholds our legal obligations.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Tomorrow I will be part of a cross-party group of Scottish parliamentarians, from the Scottish National party, the Labour party and the Scottish Green party, who are going to the Court of Justice in Luxembourg to establish that it would be possible for this Parliament to tell the Prime Minister to revoke her article 50 notice.

Does she share my sense of pride that it will be Scottish parliamentarians and the Scottish courts who will give this Parliament a true alternative to her deeply flawed deal?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that the hon. and learned Lady has consistently raised the issue of the revocation of the article 50 notice. As she knows, it is not going to happen, because it is not Government policy.

**Joseph Johnson** (Orpington) (Con): The Prime Minister said in her statement and in various letters that her deal will protect jobs. Could she please tell me which region or regions of the United Kingdom will be more prosperous, with higher productivity and higher GDP per capita, than they otherwise would be under present arrangements within the EU?

**The Prime Minister:** The answer to that question is that the extent to which we are able to enhance the prosperity and the number of jobs in the regions of the United Kingdom depends on a whole variety of decisions that will be taken by this Government. It is our good management of the economy that has ensured that 3.3 million jobs have already been created. If my hon. Friend remembers the Budget in November, he will be aware of the Office for Budget Responsibility’s prediction that 800,000 jobs will be created over the next period of years in this country.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has been very clear this afternoon that she does not think that the public, having voted to leave the European Union, should have a say on what happens next on the deal that she has done. Can she therefore confirm that if this House votes down her deal, she will not seek to force a second vote on it, or will we find out, as the DUP has, that it is one rule for her and no say for anyone else?

**The Prime Minister:** I will be working to persuade Members of this House that the deal on the table delivers on the vote of the British people, and that it does so while protecting jobs, protecting our security and protecting our United Kingdom.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My right hon. Friend will recall how much we both hoped that I would be able to support whatever she brought back from her negotiations, so can I say how sad I am that I cannot possibly support this deal, which pays £38 billion simply to kick the can down the road? How can we possibly agree to such an arrangement? At the moment, we have the unilateral right to leave the European Union, but we will have no such unilateral right to leave these new arrangements, which will be subject to an EU veto. That is giving up control, not taking back control.

**The Prime Minister:** In my statement, I set out various elements relating to the backstop, to which my hon. Friend refers. Looking at the future treaty arrangements, which will cover security partnership and economic partnership, I would expect that, as in any trade agreement, there will of course be appropriate arrangements for review and for the question of the potential termination of those relationships.

[*The Prime Minister*]

I repeat the point I have made previously in relation to the £39 billion: I think it would be wrong for this House to believe that, on leaving, the United Kingdom will have no legal obligations to pay money to the European Union. There are legal obligations to pay money to the European Union, and I think it is important that we abide by those obligations.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The National Institute of Economic and Social Research published a report today showing that this deal would make the UK £100 billion a year worse off by 2030, which equates to £1,000 per person per year. If the Prime Minister really believes that the majority of the UK wants that outcome, can I politely suggest that she is not knocking on enough doors? Will she commit to giving the nation a final say on the exact terms of her deal?

**The Prime Minister:** I have responded on a number of occasions this afternoon, and indeed on other occasions when I have given statements to the House, on the question of a second referendum.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): On Saturday morning, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the “Today” programme that, as the UK is split down the middle on the European Union:

“Anything which looks like one half of the country ‘winning’ and the other half ‘losing’ is disastrous”.

In that case, does the Prime Minister agree with him? If so, what was the point of holding the referendum in the first place?

**The Prime Minister:** The point is a very simple one. Now is the time for this country to come back together again. It is time for us to recognise that, in delivering on leaving the European Union, as people voted for in 2016, we are meeting the instruction we were given by the people in that referendum and we are doing it in this deal in a way that protects jobs, livelihoods, our security and our United Kingdom. Now is the time for the country to come back together, to get behind this deal and to ensure that we can build a better future for all.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Last week, the Prime Minister managed to insult and upset over 3 million European citizens who live and work in this country. Over 150,000 of them, like my German husband who has been a GP here for over 30 years, felt absolutely thrown away after spending decades here looking after us when we are ill. Will the Prime Minister perhaps take this opportunity to apologise for her thoughtless and insulting comments?

**The Prime Minister:** I should not have used that language in that speech. The point I was making is a simple one. Right from the very beginning, I have said that citizens’ rights is a key issue that I want to see addressed in the withdrawal agreement. That was one of the things we put at the top as one of our priorities, and we have delivered it for people in the withdrawal agreement.

Most people here in the United Kingdom want to see people coming to this country with skills and wanting to make a contribution—the hon. Lady’s husband has

made a contribution as a GP here in this country—and they want people to be judged, as we will, on their skills and on their contribution to our economy, rather than simply on where they come from.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the easiest thing in the world for people to criticise any deal that they have not spent time—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] And it is the easiest thing in the world for people to remain in the entrenched positions they have been in for the past two years. But the braver thing, and the right thing for this country now, is for us to challenge ourselves on our views of Brexit, to step up to the plate as elected representatives, to give this deal the scrutiny it needs, to read carefully the economic forecasts the Government will publish and to realise that what will cost us far more than £39 billion is a no-deal Brexit, which needs to be avoided.

**The Prime Minister:** I say to my right hon. Friend—this was a point made very well by my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois)—that this is a very important moment for this country. That is why when people come to debate this topic and to vote on it, I hope they will look, as she has said, at the analysis set before them and at the details of the deal, recall the need to deliver for the British people on the vote of Brexit and also recall the need for us to consider our constituents’ jobs and livelihoods for the future. Debates in this House are all about serious matters, but this is an historic moment for our country, and it is right that we approach it in the right way.

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Ind): Does the Prime Minister accept that should we have to use the backstop, we can escape only if the whole of the rest of the EU gives us permission to do so and that they are in a position to demand any ransom for us to gain our exit?

**The Prime Minister:** It is possible to come out of the backstop if it is shown that it can be superseded by the future relationship or by alternative arrangements that can be put in place. The key is being able to show that we are delivering on the commitment for the people of Northern Ireland in relation to the border.

**Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): The Prime Minister, in her statement, speaks of the European Court of Justice and how this deal “ends the jurisdiction” of the ECJ. So can my right hon. Friend give a precise date, or even a year, when the UK will no longer be bound by, be subject to or have imposed on it any judgments from the ECJ?

**The Prime Minister:** As my right hon. Friend will, I am sure, recall, one of the elements of the citizens’ rights section in the withdrawal agreement does have a period of time where it will be possible for the issues in relations to citizens’ rights to be considered by the European Court of Justice—after that point, there will be no jurisdiction of the ECJ in the United Kingdom. In all other matters, there will be no jurisdiction of the ECJ in the UK prior to that point. There is a limited range of issues that can be considered in relation to citizens’ rights during that draw-down period. It will be

the case that people will not be able to take cases to the ECJ in this country. It will be the case that it will be our courts that are determining and interpreting our laws.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I am genuinely sorry to say this to the Prime Minister, but there is a stark difference between stoic determination and sheer stubbornness and a failure to listen to this House or to the people. She has come here today with the same old script, telling us that we have to vote for this piece of paper that will make us poorer, weaker, less influential, less well-off and less secure, and she expects to get the consent of this House. She said as a result that she wants to appeal over our heads and go to the people. If she wants to go to the people, why is she afraid to put this question to a people's vote?

**The Prime Minister:** I have answered the question of a people's vote on a number of occasions. I say this to the hon. Gentleman as well: I believe in delivering on the vote of the British people that took place in 2016, for the reasons I have set out, but for those who consider that a second vote of some shape or form would do anything other than divide this country further or create more uncertainty, they only have to look at what happened during the initial referendum campaign. We asked people to choose; they chose; it is our duty to deliver.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): So many young people in my constituency have got work in the car industry, whose principal market is in Europe, but car manufacturers warn us that no deal could result in tariffs of £4.5 billion. So can my right hon. Friend confirm that her hard-won deal would provide much-needed certainty and continuity and, above all, safeguard jobs?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the importance of the automotive industry in my right hon. Friend's constituency and many others around the country. Indeed, the political declaration on the tariff issue expressly provides for no tariffs.

**Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): Will the agreement that the Prime Minister has sought stop us joining a federal Europe, stop us joining the euro—never to join it—and stop the dictates and the stupid laws coming from Europe? The way I see it, we have got two feet in and one arm out.

**The Prime Minister:** I can give the hon. Gentleman comfort on all the points that he makes. The point is that we are coming out of the European Union, so if it chooses to push down to a more federal Europe, we will not be part of that; we are not a member of the euro and we are coming out of the European Union, so we will certainly not be in the euro; and we will be making our laws.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that under her leadership this United Kingdom will never, ever become a vassal state? Will she also confirm that if naked self-interest on either side of the Chamber prevails over national interest, we could end up as an impoverished state?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend confirmation on the first point that he made. Of course, the proposals that we have put forward in relation to our future economic relationship ensure that Parliament will determine our laws. When it comes to this vote,

everybody in this House should consider and put first the national interest, not their own interest or their party political interest.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The official note of yesterday's European Council meeting states that

“a fisheries agreement is a matter of priority, and should build on, inter alia, existing reciprocal access and quota shares.”

When one compares that with the Prime Minister's statement today, one can understand why our fishermen are anxious. This situation arises only because the Prime Minister agreed to include fisheries in the transitional arrangements. With the benefit of hindsight, does she now agree that that was a mistake?

**The Prime Minister:** That is not the case. I think the right hon. Gentleman was quoting the minute of the Council meeting of the 27, which has in it a number of issues that actually show—[*Interruption.*] Yes, other member states do have concerns in relation to a number of these issues. They have those concerns partly because they were not able to arrive at the position that they would have preferred to have in the political declaration that we have agreed with the European Union, because we have resolutely stood up for our fishermen.

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend has been working hard in what she sees as the best interests of the country, and it has been a pretty thankless task, but I must say to her that I did worry when I read at the weekend her letter to the British people, which sets out a picture of the future that seems to me to be at clear variance with any rational analysis of the text in relation to the political declaration. How can we seriously say to people that the Northern Ireland backstop will not act as a fetter on our future freedom of action? How can we say that we will lose the jurisdiction of the ECJ, when it is in fact going to continue to play a major part in our lives for the foreseeable future? If we are to have an informed debate, would it not be better that we are completely transparent about the sorts of problems that we will have to face when, if the Prime Minister succeeds with her motion in two weeks' time, we get through the stage of leaving the EU on 29 March? The truth of the matter is that our problems have hardly begun.

**The Prime Minister:** Of course it is the case—I explained the reason why earlier—that we have to negotiate the full legal text of the future economic partnership and the future security partnership, and I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will understand the reason for that. What is important is that we have in the political declaration the set of instructions to the negotiators in respect of the basis on which the future relationship will be set, which is one that in trade terms is ambitious and unlike any other given to any other third country and that in security terms is also unlike any other given to any third country, because it is more ambitious, closer and a better partnership than any other country has.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, if we go back to square one, we will retain a seat, a voice and a vote; we will stay in the single market and the customs union; and we will be in a better place than we would be in the backstop?

**The Prime Minister:** No, we are leaving the European Union, and we are leaving on 29 March 2019.

**Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con):** In her answer to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), my right hon. Friend said that we can leave the backstop if it can be “shown” that we have met the criteria. Who will be the arbiter of when it is “shown”, and to whom are we accountable to make sure that they will allow us to leave?

**The Prime Minister:** The initial discussion, of course, takes place between the two parties of the United Kingdom and the European Union, but there is a process that goes through the Joint Committee of the two bodies, and there is also an arbitration panel and an arbitration process that can be brought into operation in relation to that. Throughout the withdrawal agreement, in various elements, there are references to good faith on both sides. If it is the case that the commitment to Northern Ireland has been met, it will be clear that we can come out of the backstop—were it the backstop that had been put in place in the first place.

**Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab):** One of the problems that the Prime Minister has had to grapple with over the past two years is that those who campaigned to leave the European Union had no blueprint for what they would do if they won the referendum, but the Government are now repeating that mistake. Will the Prime Minister tell the House what plans are being put in place if, as it now seems likely, the Government lose the vote on 12 December? What preparations are being put in place for either extending article 50 or for a people’s vote to put this question to the country?

**The Prime Minister:** I have answered those questions on article 50 and the people’s vote in response to other questions. My focus is on this deal and the fact that this is the deal that is good for the United Kingdom, because it delivers on the Brexit vote in a way that protects jobs.

**Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):** If it is indeed true that both the Government and the European Union believe that this backstop will be temporary, will the Prime Minister take an opportunity before the meaningful vote, or indeed accept an amendment to the meaningful vote, to make it absolutely clear that if, by the end of the due date of this Parliament, we are still held in this backstop and still held in customs arrangements against our will, she will abrogate those parts of the treaty and restore our national sovereignty?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend, I know, has raised with me before the question about the extent to which we are able to pull out of these treaty arrangements, and he and I are corresponding on that particular matter. May I say to him that not only is it the clear intent of both parties, using their best endeavours in good faith in these documents, to ensure that we are able to have the future relationship in place by the end of December 2020 and thereafter, but that should it be the case that an alternative arrangement has to be in place for Northern Ireland, it should be for only a temporary period, whether backstop or other arrangement, because it is not a given that that would be the backstop—*[Interruption.]* There are a lot of voices saying no, but it is not a given that that would be the backstop. It is my

firm intention to ensure that, at the end of this Parliament, we are all able to look the British people clearly in the eye and say, “We have delivered on Brexit; we have delivered on what you wanted to ensure, which was an end to free movement, an end to the jurisdiction of the European court and an end to sending vast sums of money to Europe every year.”

**Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab):** The Prime Minister has made it very clear that, at all costs, she wants to avoid a no-deal Brexit. My right hon. Friend the Leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition has also reassured Labour MPs that it is his priority to avoid a no-deal Brexit. Given that there are some 80 Conservative Back Benchers who will vote against any deal come what may, in the national interest will the Prime Minister sit down with my right hon. Friend and have a meaningful discussion about how we make sure that, when it comes to workers’ rights and health and safety, we do not fall behind and we secure a sustainable customs arrangement going forward?

**The Prime Minister:** What we have done in the proposals that we put forward in the White Paper and in the political declaration is to ensure that we do look for that free trade area and that appropriate customs arrangement that is going to deliver on jobs for people. I am interested that the right hon. Lady has indicated that the Leader of the Opposition is clear that we should leave the European Union with a deal, because previously he indicated that he would vote against any deal that the Government brought back.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con):** Nobody can fail to acknowledge the personal commitment, determination and best intentions of the Prime Minister. If this House does not pass the agreement, will she confirm that she has ruled out extending the negotiating period, or even purchasing an extension to that period?

**The Prime Minister:** The extension of the negotiating period would be an extension of article 50. I am clear that we will not extend article 50 and that we will leave the EU on 29 March next year.

**Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab):** On Friday, my constituents got the desperate news of 241 job losses at Vauxhall Motors, Ellesmere Port, bringing the total to 900 job losses since the referendum. When the Government will not even do the basics to help the automotive industries, including ending the discrimination on business rates, how on earth are my constituents supposed to trust this Government’s political wish list about their economic future?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sorry to hear of the job losses at Vauxhall in the hon. Lady’s constituency, but we have seen many examples of extra investment going into the automotive industry in this country. She referenced what the Government are doing. The Government have been working very closely with the automotive industry. We are keen to ensure that this country is at the leading edge of the automotive industry, which is exactly what we are doing with both autonomous and electric vehicles.

**Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** This morning the Government published what they describe as the “Explainer for the Political Declaration”. Page 1 of

that explainer states that the political declaration and the withdrawal agreement

“have been settled together on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.”

In the light of the Prime Minister’s responses to my right hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) and for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), why—if that sentence is correct—does it not mean that the £39 billion is contingent upon us getting agreement on the future arrangements?

**The Prime Minister:** The withdrawal agreement and political declaration were indeed agreed together, but I repeat the point that I have made to others: it is the case that, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in relation to leaving the European Union, there will be legal obligations of a financial nature that this country has to abide by.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): The ink was hardly dry on this agreement before the French President was saying that he would be using its legally binding provisions to lever further concessions on fishing and other issues from the UK Government. Other states are no doubt thinking the same. Does the Prime Minister not recognise that, by signing this legally binding agreement, she is handing the EU a cudgel that it will use to mug us for the second time when it comes to the negotiations on the future trade arrangements?

**The Prime Minister:** No, I do not agree. I referenced earlier, and am happy to do so again, the remarks made by the French President in relation to the backstop and access to fishing. I will repeat the point, which is a very simple one: if the backstop is exercised, we will be outside the common fisheries policy, and it will be the United Kingdom that will determine which boats have access to UK waters.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that as a party of government we have a responsibility not just to embody the divisions that exist in the country on this issue, but to try to bridge them and to fix them? To that end, is not it the case that her deal on the table has the overwhelming advantage of being the only one grounded in reality, giving us a chance to move forward so we do not keep going around the same mountain again and again?

**The Prime Minister:** First, my right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the responsibility that Members of this House have. Secondly, there are many circumstances, including in this, where people can wish that something was different from what it is. But the reality is, as the European Union has made clear, that there would be no agreement without a backstop, so without a backstop there would be no deal, and this is the deal. This, I believe, is a good deal for the UK and the right deal for the UK.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Prime Minister knows fine well that there is no dividend to be had from this withdrawal agreement. Under all economic analysis, we will be worse off for decades for come. So is it not time for her to level with the British public and accept that, because this decision needs to be taken as a political fix rather than an

economically rational decision, it is one that should be put back to the people who started this process back in 2016, and we will continue to ask for that until it is so?

**The Prime Minister:** As the hon. Lady has heard, I am very clear that we should leave the European Union because the vote of the British people was to leave the EU. It may be the policy of others not to do so. I do not know if it is the hon. Lady’s. By the sound of it, she would rather we stayed in the European Union. I do not think that would be right. I think that would be betraying the trust that the people put in us.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): May I urge the Prime Minister, when she hears cries of “No surrender” as some Members of this House want to drag us to a no-deal Brexit, to remember that that would be catastrophic for my constituents in Eddisbury? Will she remind those Members of the House that the Conservative manifesto made commitments to

“a deep and special partnership”

and “a comprehensive...customs agreement” with Europe? Does this deal deliver on that?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that this deal does indeed deliver on that manifesto commitment.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Under this agreement, from January 2021, for foreign nationals who fly from a third country into Dublin, then travel on to Belfast and thence to the rest of the UK, where will the immigration border be?

**The Prime Minister:** The common travel area will continue to exist. That is one of the things that has been agreed in the withdrawal agreement.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): The power to extend the transition or the backstop indefinitely has got to be a trap, hasn’t it?

**The Prime Minister:** No, and precisely because of the reasons that I set out. Not only is it clear that that can only be temporary, but it is also the case that many in the European Union believe that the backstop is actually a place that gives the United Kingdom an advantage—an advantage that they would not wish to give us.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): In some one hour and 30 minutes, I think I have heard three ringing endorsements of the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal. I do not know what that tells me, but I certainly would like to know what it tells her. Will she confirm today that, if she does lose this vote, she will do all her Back Benchers a favour and confirm that she will resign?

**The Prime Minister:** I am focusing on actually ensuring that Members of this House see the benefits that I believe are there from this deal. It is a good deal for the UK. Everybody will have a decision to take about their responsibility to deliver on Brexit for the British people when the vote comes.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I do have respect for the Prime Minister, and I understand her position. However, over the past few years, we have had very difficult cutbacks to local services in constituencies such as mine—in Harlow—and across the country, and

[Robert Halfon]

every time we make the case that it is a difficult economy and we do not have enough money. How do I explain to my constituents that we have £39 billion to get out from the Treasury sofa to give to the European Union when it is questionable whether we owe all that money? Does she not agree that this is not just about the European Union—it is a matter of social justice?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend will recognise that the commitments that the Government have made to increase funding for our public services in a number of areas, which do affect his constituents, reflect the needs that he has consistently raised in this House and raised with Government. I return to the point that I made previously about the financial settlement with the European Union—there are legal obligations that this country has, and I believe that, as a country, we should be the sort of place that actually meets our legal obligations.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): The Prime Minister must surely now recognise that she is flogging a dead horse. May I urge her to join forces with senior members of her Cabinet and Members on both sides of the House to back a Norway plus-based Brexit? It is the only option that protects jobs, solves the Northern Ireland border issue and has a chance of reuniting our deeply divided country.

**The Prime Minister:** Actually, the option that the hon. Gentleman puts forward does not deliver on the vote of the British people, which is what I believe we should do.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): That which is apparently dead in the water can move on a rising tide, but if the Prime Minister is going to carry the tide with her, she needs to allow herself time. Would it not be better to have a meaningful vote in January, after Christmas? Is not a truly meaningful vote one that includes the trade negotiations? That is what we should be voting on.

**The Prime Minister:** The timing of the meaningful vote has to reflect not only the need for a sufficient number of days of debate here in the House, but the need subsequently to get the withdrawal agreement Bill through the House before 29 March. I think my hon. Friend virtually gave the Leader of the House a heart attack when he suggested delaying the meaningful vote until January.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): If the backstop applies to Northern Ireland, and the rest of the United Kingdom is not operating under the backstop in that scenario, is it not the case that the citizens of Gibraltar will have more rights than the citizens of Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**The Prime Minister:** No. Certainly the Commission's original proposal would have split the customs territory of the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland would have been treated entirely differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. We resisted that, which is why we have the UK-wide customs territory—something the EU resisted for many months—in the backstop.

**Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for her dedication and hard work to endeavour to get a Brexit for Britain. However, does she appreciate and understand the real concern of my constituents that, if the backstop is implemented, Britain could remain subservient to the EU for a very long time, if not forever?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments in relation to what I have been doing. I recognise that that concern has been raised, but there are a number of reasons why I believe that it is met by the arrangements in the withdrawal agreement. It is very clear in the withdrawal agreement that, if the backstop is implemented—and it does not have to be implemented—it is only temporary. It is clear from the point of view of the European Union that the legal base of the withdrawal agreement is article 50, and that that cannot be used to set up a permanent arrangement. Finally, if the backstop is exercised, we have the ability to ensure that it is superseded by the future relationship, and the intent to develop that future relationship in time for the backstop not to be used is clear throughout the document.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Seventy-eight per cent. of our businesses that export do so to the EU and are able to trade goods and services seamlessly. For the £200 a person that we pay the EU, UK citizens have the right to live, work, study, travel and holiday free of fees and red tape. Some might even describe that as a good deal. But is it not true that the Prime Minister's deal and political declaration do little more than take away the biscuit while leaving the nation the crumbs? Is it not her duty to at least tell the British people how much we are set to lose in every region and nation? Why will she not do that?

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Lady is asking me whether the Government are going to produce economic analysis, I can tell her that we are.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): Businesses in my constituency point out firmly that their greatest enemy is uncertainty and they are now starting to tell me that certainty will be provided by World Trade Organisation terms because of the weakness of our negotiating position once we exit the period required for unanimity under the future arrangements. Government Departments have now had 20 months to prepare for a straight transfer to WTO terms. We would have some share of £39 billion to ensure that that transition was worked as effectively as possible by our European Union partners, whose policies would dictate how well that transition went. Surely those preparations now need to be surfaced and the European Union engaged in those discussions.

**The Prime Minister:** Businesses do look for certainty and certainty is given to businesses in the withdrawal agreement, because it is a withdrawal agreement that contains within it the implementation period that ensures that businesses have that certainty going beyond 29 March next year. As regards the World Trade Organisation arrangements for trading with the European Union, I am frequently encouraged by colleagues around the House to ensure that we can negotiate really good trade arrangements with countries around the rest of the

world that will not be based on WTO arrangements. I have to say that, if WTO arrangements are not good enough for those other deals around the world, I think it is entirely right that we seek to obtain, as we have done, commitments to better than WTO arrangements in our relationship with the European Union.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): If the Court of Justice rules tomorrow that article 50 is revocable, will the Prime Minister institute a British Brexit pause so that she can make a better fist of resolving the disagreements that are so obvious in the House today?

**The Prime Minister:** We will not be revoking article 50 or asking for the extension of article 50, and we will be leaving the EU on 29 March next year.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, although the withdrawal agreement was voted on by the European Union under qualified majority rules, if it is passed by our Parliament, any future relationship and release from the backstop will be subject to 27 individual EU vetoes? That means France will demand our fish, Spain will demand Gibraltar and the Republic of Ireland may even demand Northern Ireland, and the only alternative to these humiliating betrayals and capitulations will be continued vassalage forever under the backstop.

**The Prime Minister:** Obviously, the arrangements in relation to the backstop and for the backstop ceasing to apply are those that are set out in the withdrawal agreement, and of course that does potentially end in the arbitration arrangement. Of course, in terms of the future relationship, the role that is had by the EU and by individual member states will depend on the precise legal form that that agreement or agreements take. But of course if there are areas that are of mixed competence then there would be a role for national Parliaments. If it is only one of EU competence, then of course it is under the sole competence of the EU.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister look at the analysis of information gathered by Best for Britain and Hope not Hate across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which shows that 56% of people wish to remain in the European Union now, 66% want a final say in any deal and 422 constituencies now back remain? Will the Prime Minister listen to the will of the people, which has changed, and give them a people's vote?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said on many occasions, this Parliament gave the decision whether or not to leave the European Union to the British people and the British people voted.

**Mrs Moon:** They've changed their mind.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady is saying to me that the British people have changed their mind. If we went down the route that she suggests, and there was another vote and possibly a change of direction, then those who had voted to leave in the first place would rightly say, "Hang on a minute. We need to have another opportunity to vote on this." This is not the way to conduct these arrangements. We decided to give the vote to the British people. We did that, they voted and we should deliver on that vote.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): At Lancaster House in January 2017, my right hon. Friend said very clearly that we will

"ensure that...no new barriers to living and doing business within our own Union are created".

She went on to say that

"we will...bring an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Britain... Because we will not have truly left the European Union if we are not in control of our own laws."

We are now facing a situation where part of our country is likely to be treated differently—Northern Ireland. And is it not the case that, under article 175 and the dispute mechanism, if both sides cannot agree, the ECJ will be the final arbiter?

**The Prime Minister:** No. First, there are, of course, regulatory differences already between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. They are in limited areas, but they do exist. Secondly, the European Court of Justice would not be the final arbiter—that is not what is set out in the withdrawal agreement. The arbitration panel would make that decision, not the ECJ.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): The Prime Minister steadfastly and tellingly refuses to say that her Brexit deal will make Britain better off. If she cannot offer a guarantee to my constituents that they will not be worse off as a result of this deal, how can she ask me to vote for it?

**The Prime Minister:** As I expressly said earlier, I believe that we can be better off outside the EU. The mistake all too often made is made by those who say that the only issue about our future prosperity is whether we are a member of the EU. I disagree. The issue of our future prosperity is about us and decisions that Governments and this Parliament take about our economy, and it is about the talents of our people, and I am full of optimism about our prosperity outside the EU precisely because of the talents of our people.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Prime Minister is aware that many of us have wished her well in these negotiations, but it appears that the withdrawal agreement sacrifices much and secures very little. Article 129(3) states that

"the United Kingdom shall refrain, during the transition period, from any action...which is likely to be prejudicial to the Union's interest".

Does this mean that the UK will be unable, for example, to cut taxes, regulate businesses such as Uber and disagree with EU foreign policy in the United Nations, and why is this clause not reciprocated by the EU?

**The Prime Minister:** No. There is a duty on both sides to act in good faith during the implementation or transition period. The UK today, as a member of the EU, does not take an EU position on the UN Security Council. We are an independent member of the Security Council—we sit there in our own right—and take positions as the United Kingdom. I am happy to write to my hon. Friend with further details—he raised several points—but I do not believe that the position he set out is the correct interpretation.

**Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said previously that this country's best days are ahead. Is that because of the deal she has negotiated with the EU, and does she think it better than the one we have now?

**The Prime Minister:** I have said that I believe that it is a good deal for the United Kingdom and that our best days lie ahead of us. I believe that because of the talents of our people, our innovation and decisions that this Government have taken to ensure a balanced approach to our economy.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I would like to put on the record my support for the Prime Minister, not because the deal is perfect—it involves compromises—but because it is a matter of judgment. When I go around my constituency, people tell me they do not want to leave without a deal. There is no precedent for leaving the EU. This is a completely bespoke process. Does she agree that she has succeeded in defying many critics on all sides, because she has come back with a deal and stood up to the EU in many different respects?

**The Prime Minister:** Indeed, the UK has stood up rigorously in a number of areas in relation to the deal. Of course, it is not 100% of what either side would want—that is what negotiations are about—but I believe it is a good deal for the United Kingdom and the right deal for the United Kingdom and that it delivers on the people's vote and for their future.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): The Prime Minister has frequently said during the negotiations that nothing will be agreed until everything is agreed, but is it not clear from the political declaration that, even in the unlikely event that the deal is agreed in its entirety, on really big issues about our future economic and security co-operation with the EU, absolutely nothing will have been agreed?

**The Prime Minister:** No, the political declaration is a clear set of instructions to the negotiators on the legal text. I have also on a number of occasions made clear the position on the European Union not being able to sign a legal treaty relating to these trade matters with a country until that country is a third country.

**Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): Some 123,000 defence industry jobs nationwide and our security and that of our allies depend on our defence industry being competitive and flexible, with Government involvement, yet the permanent backstop in the withdrawal agreement that would apply should the EU not choose arbitration would oblige our defence industry to comply with EU state aid law, from which EU defence firms are exempt. Why would my right hon. Friend give the EU this—yet another hostage to negotiate with—and have us beg to keep our sovereign ability in defence?

**The Prime Minister:** First, this is not a permanent backstop. Secondly, I do not share my hon. Friend's interpretation in relation to the defence industry. The issue of state aid is simple: in any trade agreement we have with any country around the world, there would need to be elements relating to competitiveness matters, such as state aid. In the White Paper in the summer, we

put forward a set of proposals that went further than some arrangements that would be in other trade agreements, but it is not the case that state aid will never be included in trade arrangements. State aid is included in trade arrangements.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I was agnostic about a people's vote, but now that we can see that the very best deal that the Prime Minister can negotiate will leave us worse off, will give us less say and is, rightly, likely to be rejected by this House as not in the best interests of our constituents, should she not in honour now go back to the people?

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I have given earlier on that question.

**Mr Alister Jack** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): The Prime Minister said in her statement that this House can choose to reject this deal or go back to square one. Will she spell out to the House exactly what square one means?

**The Prime Minister:** What I meant was that we will go back to a period of significant uncertainty and division. It is important that we recognise that we have a duty to deliver on the Brexit vote, having a care for our constituents' jobs and livelihoods and their future, and this deal delivers on both of those.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Why is the £20 billion for the NHS that has already been announced now being spun as an additional £394 million a week Brexit dividend for the NHS, when we all know that the savings from membership of the EU will be outweighed by the additional costs that we will have to pay?

**The Prime Minister:** We will be putting extra investment of £394 million a week into our national health service. The funding from that will come from a number of sources, but we will be able to use the Brexit dividend on priorities such as the NHS and other public services.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): My right hon. Friend said that one of the benefits of leaving the EU is the ability to sign trade agreements with third countries, but what realistic prospect is there for that while we remain within the customs union and even after that, when we have pledged to maintain "deep regulatory and customs cooperation" covering goods—probably the very goods that people want to sell to us?

**The Prime Minister:** We will be able to sign free trade arrangements with the rest of the world, and we already have significant interest from various parts of the world. I take my right hon. Friend's point about our proposal on frictionless trade with a commitment—subject to a parliamentary lock—in relation to the common rulebook on goods and agricultural products. Of course, many of those rules are international standards; they are not just EU-related standards, but standards that our manufacturers would abide by in any case. That is a key issue. We want to have good trade relations and agreements not only with countries in the rest of the world, but with the EU.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Since the 2016 referendum, many young people have come of age and by the end of 2020 many more will have done so. The Prime Minister, however, has ruled out a second referendum under any circumstances at any time and the next general election will only be due in 2022. What is she afraid of in not allowing those millions of young people a direct say in arrangements with Europe that will affect their future?

**The Prime Minister:** It is a question of delivering on the vote that took place in 2016. With due respect to the hon. Gentleman, at any point in time somebody can argue that another cohort of young people have come to voting age. At any point in time, if his argument followed, it could be possible to say there needs to be another vote. No. We had the vote in 2016. People voted and we should deliver on it.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): When I was on the railway platform this morning in Taunton, I met the leader of a very important business in my constituency, related to the car industry, which employs hundreds of people and trades across the EU. Do you know what he said to me, Mr Speaker? He said, “Please don’t jeopardise business, our jobs and the economy.” Does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot play games with business? We must have a deal that enables business to thrive and enables us to leave the EU, which is what people wanted? Surely, this deal addresses both.

**The Prime Minister:** Yes. I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the views of business in Taunton to the House. She is absolutely right. We listen to business. That is exactly why the free trade area with good customs arrangements lies at the heart of our future economic partnership. This deal delivers Brexit, but it does it in a way that enables business to thrive and jobs to be protected.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Prime Minister is fond of telling us what the British people think. She trumpets the end of freedom of movement as a plus of what is now a face-saving exercise, but for businesses that are losing their EU workforces, for EU nationals—there are 13,000 in my seat—and for young people who want to study and live abroad, that, as well as her crass comments about jumping the queue, are a tragedy. Is it not time that she sought a fresh assessment of the will of the people and gave all electors in this 65 million nation—not just 650 MPs—a say? What if the will of the people in June 2016 is no longer the will of the people?

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave earlier.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Despite the Prime Minister’s honourable and good intentions, is it not an indisputable fact, irrespective of whether colleagues voted remain or leave, that the political declaration is not legally binding and the withdrawal agreement is legally binding?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The withdrawal agreement is legally binding. The political declaration is not a legal text, because the

European Union cannot sign a legal text in relation to trade matters with a country that is a member of the European Union. It can only do that when we are outside the European Union.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): It is increasingly clear that the Prime Minister’s deal does not have the support of the House. It is a bad deal: it is bad for my constituents and it is bad for the country. So I ask the Prime Minister, and she has not answered this question yet, what is her plan B when this deal inevitably falls?

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave earlier.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing alternative arrangements to the backstop within the lexicography of our Brexit arrangements? That is no mean achievement and may just about get it across the line for a number of us. Will she say what will be done to identify those who are going to work up those alternative arrangements, what budget has been set for that work and when those matters will be trialled and piloted?

**The Prime Minister:** I am not able to give my hon. Friend immediate answers to all those questions, and particularly the questions around trialling and piloting. There are proposals that have been put forward to us. We will—first of all here in the UK—be looking at those proposals and the extent to which they deliver on what is necessary, and we will be speaking and have spoken with the European Commission about the possibility of being able, at an early stage, to discuss with it those alternative proposals.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): The Prime Minister and at least one of her Cabinet Ministers have said that if the House rejects her deal, there is a chance of no Brexit at all. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend could spell out with greater clarity how this fear might be realised.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman will have heard a number of individuals around the House, including some of his colleagues on the Labour Benches, clearly expressing the view that they believe that remaining in the European Union is preferable to leaving it. I believe that it is important for us to deliver on the vote that the people took and to deliver Brexit.

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on living in the real world and on bringing back a deal that delivers on the 2016 vote without wrecking our economy. Is it not the case that nobody has put forward a better deal in nearly two hours of debate, and does she share my thoughts that it is ironic that those who might be scuppering Brexit are the ones who wanted it in the first place?

**The Prime Minister:** It is absolutely the case that we have not seen an alternative proposal put forward that meets the needs of the British people in terms of the Brexit vote and does so in a way that protects jobs, our security and our United Kingdom. As I have said

[*The Prime Minister*]

previously, when it comes to the vote, we will all need to consider our duty to deliver on the vote of the British people and deliver Brexit.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): To both the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and me, among many other colleagues, the Prime Minister has stressed repeatedly—this is a quote from *Hansard*:

“I am clear that we will become an independent coastal state and that we will be able to take back that control. We will be able to make those decisions and negotiate on our own behalf on those issues, rather than it being done by the European Union.”—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2018; Vol. 648, c. 72.]

There is no capability to carry out this function in the draft withdrawal agreement. Indeed, French and Spanish fishermen are already boasting of their continued ability to fish as they currently do in our waters. Can the Prime Minister explain exactly how our fishing sector will enjoy the benefits of an independent coastal state with control through this so-called deal, or is this just another, “Well, it’s the best they will offer us, so we will have to take it and sell off the fishing industry”—as you have Northern Ireland—“and for good measure throw in a £39 billion repayment to the EU as well”?

**The Prime Minister:** In a number of elements of the political declaration, it is clear that we will be an independent coastal state. What being an independent coastal state means is that we will be able to determine access to our waters, but of course, our fishermen will want to be looking not just at the access that others have to our waters, but at their access to other waters. So there will be a negotiation with the European Union in relation to access to waters, but the UK will be negotiating on behalf of the UK in that determination. I apologise, because I forget which particular piece of text it is in, but there is a clear commitment that that should be undertaken such that—because this commitment has been made—we will be an independent coastal state in December 2020. Although the implementation period will not have finished, we will be able to negotiate for 2021, because that is when that negotiation will take place as an independent coastal state.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Since the summer, I have knocked on the front doors of over 7,000 of my constituents in Elmet and Rothwell, and I have had hundreds of supermarket surgeries and spoken to hundreds of people. I can say, especially in relation to the comments from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), that not only do most of my constituents say, “Get behind the Prime Minister and her deal,” but so too do my executive council and my officers, and so do I. Will my right hon. Friend today put to rest one of the new paranoias doing the rounds and confirm that this deal does not sign us up to permanent structured co-operation, or PESCO—the European army—nor do we have any intention of signing up to PESCO or the European army?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and I can give him that reassurance. The development of PESCO does have the potential to improve Europe’s defence capabilities in a way that should be coherent with NATO, but this does not require us to participate or sign us up to participating in

the PESCO framework. What it does say is that we may participate in PESCO projects as a third country, but that, of course, would be a decision for us to take—as to whether we wish to apply to do that—and we would not be part of that PESCO framework. As I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) in the statement last week, we are certainly not signing up to a European army, and we would not sign up to a European army.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister confirm that we will still be a member of Europol and Eurojust, or will we merely be shadowing and co-operating with them? Will she also tell me what the status of the European Court of Justice and the European arrest warrant will be when we have left the European Union under her terms?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that the political declaration states that we “will...work together to identify the terms for the United Kingdom’s cooperation via Europol and Eurojust.”

We have always said that we recognise, for example, that payment may be needed for us to act as a member of, or have some participation in, Europol and Eurojust, but the important point is that the concept of our being part of that, despite being a third country, is in there.

I believe it is important that we have had this exchange before in the House, and I believe it is important that we have within this the terms for ensuring that we have surrender arrangements like the European arrest warrant. Of course, the issue of the determination of courts in relation to the surrender matters is one that we will be considering, but we are clear that jurisdiction in these matters is for the UK courts.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): I congratulate the Prime Minister on securing what I believe is a fair and reasonable deal. There will come a time—some time before July next year, and possibly well before then—when she will have to take a view on whether we head towards a possible backstop or increase the implementation period. I should be interested to hear what considerations she thinks might arise as to which route she takes at that time.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. July 2020 is set in the withdrawal agreement as the date by which a decision will be taken, and there will be a number of issues to be taken into account at that stage. The first will be the key question of whether the future relationship would not be in place by the end of December 2020, and whether the extended period would therefore be necessary for either the backstop or the implementation period, or alternative arrangements. A balanced judgment would be made. In the implementation period, there would be an expectation of a financial obligation; there would not be a financial obligation were we in the backstop. We would not have free movement were we in the backstop; free movement would almost certainly be required to continue in the event of an extended implementation period. Those are the sorts of issues that would need to be balanced at that time.

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): This deal leaves us poorer, and it leaves us negotiating Brexit indefinitely, as is made clear in the final paragraph of the political declaration. Hard-working families and

workers are bearing the brunt of this uncertainty. That is not what anyone voted for. Is it not time for the Prime Minister, instead of buying off her own side with knighthoods, to ask the people what they want, and give them the chance to have a final say?

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I gave earlier.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I refer the House to my declarations in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I spent much of the weekend talking to businesses in my constituency. They urged me to support the Prime Minister's deal, as indeed I shall. However, I broke off to listen to what was happening about Gibraltar, because I—along with many other Members on both sides of the House and on both sides of the Brexit debate—have sought earnestly to secure the good interests of its people. I appreciate what the Prime Minister said about the way in which the Gibraltar Government and Chief Minister have negotiated and assisted in this matter.

The Chief Minister has thanked the Prime Minister personally for

“her stalwart and unflinching defence of Gibraltar”

and its interests. Those are his words. He has also said:

“The Withdrawal Agreement she has achieved today protects all of those interests and is the best way for the United Kingdom and Gibraltar to leave behind us 46 years of membership of the European Union in a managed and orderly fashion.”

Does the Prime Minister agree that those words should weigh very heavily indeed with any Member who is committed to the good interests of Gibraltar and the whole British family?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House of the Chief Minister's comments in relation to the withdrawal agreement. We were very clear that the withdrawal agreement would cover Gibraltar, and, as I said earlier, we have been working with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I commend him and his team for the work they have put in, and I think this is an important factor that Members should take into account when considering their position on this deal.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I realise that it is asking a lot for the Prime Minister to look as far ahead as January in all this chaos, but if, as seems likely, she has to put her deal to a second vote and loses that as well, what happens then? Will she have to step down? Will she seek a general election? Or is that the time, finally, to give the people a choice between her deal and staying in the EU, to see which they prefer?

**The Prime Minister:** I am looking ahead to 11 December, when this House will be faced with the decision as to whether or not it wishes to deliver on the vote of the British people with a deal that not only delivers that vote, but protects their jobs.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I have listened very carefully to the people of Sleaford and North Hykeham and to the questions asked by Members in this House, and the backstop, in particular its indefinite nature, is clearly a major concern. I welcome the answer my right hon. Friend gave to my

hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) earlier, saying that alternative arrangements for a backstop are being considered. Can my right hon. Friend tell me how quickly these proposals are being worked up and what commitment and legal text we will have on them by the time of the meaningful vote on 11 December?

**The Prime Minister:** I cannot promise that all the work will have been done by the time of the meaningful vote; I have to be honest with my hon. Friend on that, because considerable work does need to go into these arrangements. But it is significant that we got the alternative arrangements into these documents such that it would be possible to exercise them, rather than requiring the backstop to be put into place. I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend and other Members have about the nature of the backstop. There are a number of reasons throughout the withdrawal agreement why the backstop would only be temporary, and all sides agree that it would only be temporary if it were to be exercised, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that it is important that we work on those alternative arrangements.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): My father, who grew up on a farm in the west of Ireland, used to say to me, “You should never buy a pig in a poke.” I have to confess that, growing up in south Wales, I had absolutely no clue what he meant by that, until I read the political declaration of this deal. Is not one of the reasons why it is so unpopular with so many different people right across this House that it represents nothing more or less than a proverbial political pig in a poke?

**The Prime Minister:** No, it represents a good deal for the people of this country. Focusing on a future relationship that delivers a good, comprehensive trade agreement with the European Union together with a security partnership, both of which are unprecedented in their breadth and depth, I believe is good for the people of the UK.

**Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): In my right hon. Friend's response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), and indeed to other Members, she said that there are alternatives to the backstop. For the sake of clarity, if there were to be an extension to the implementation period and we had not yet reached an agreement with the EU when the extended period expired, would the backstop then kick in, or would it have fallen away?

**The Prime Minister:** I referenced the situation in which the backstop would cease to apply in my statement, and it was further referenced by the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds), the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. The alternative arrangements being considered could be in place to provide for the border in Northern Ireland instead of using the backstop or the extension of the implementation period, and crucially to provide for an alternative for coming out of the backstop were the future relationship not in place.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Is it not the simple truth that, by detailing her red lines so early, the Prime Minister negotiated us into a position

[*Matt Western*]

that was somewhere between a rock and a hard place? It now seems that she will concede on the rock this weekend, and that we will be left in a hard place. Should the meaningful vote fall, what is the Prime Minister's own backstop?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I have been asked that question, and given an answer to it, on a number of occasions. Secondly, I should like to be clear about some of the issues that I set out from the beginning. I said that we would leave the customs union; we are leaving the customs union. I said that we would leave the single market; we are leaving the single market. I said that we would leave the common agricultural policy; we are leaving the CAP. I said that we would leave the common fisheries policy; we are leaving the CFP. I said that we would bring an end to free movement; we are bringing an end to free movement. I said that we would cease the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK, and we are doing that as well. We are delivering, I believe, on the vote of the British people, but doing it in a way that protects their jobs.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): During the people's vote of 2016, every constituency in Lancashire—Labour and Conservative—voted to leave the European Union, and I am delighted to hear that the Prime Minister has reaffirmed that that is what she intends to deliver. Can she understand, however, why so many people have reservations about this deal? The backstop is one area of concern. Can she understand why it is awkward for some people to understand that we are leaving the European Union on 29 March next year but that we need to seek permission from the European Union and some independent adjudicator before we can be truly independent of the EU?

**The Prime Minister:** I do indeed recall the people's vote of 2016. I also recognise the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed in relation to the backstop. We cease to be a member of the European Union on 29 March next year, and of course we have agreed that, in the transition and implementation period, we will continue to operate very much as today in order to give businesses the smooth and orderly exit that they require and to ensure that they do not have more than one change in the arrangements they have to put in place. I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed about the backstop, but the backstop is there in order to provide for the commitment to the people of Northern Ireland. It would be there in any deal that was done with the European Union; that is very clear. Without a backstop, there would be no deal. It is important that we have the different arrangements in place to enable us to come out of the backstop, while always maintaining our commitment to the people of Northern Ireland.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): When the other EU countries discover that they have been asked to agree to something that has no chance of being agreed by this Parliament, are they not going to be a little annoyed? Would it not have been better to have sought the consent of the elected representatives of the people of this country before seeking the consent of the elected representatives of the people of other countries?

**The Prime Minister:** It is very simple: until the EU agreed the deal, there was no deal to bring back to this Parliament.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): We have heard a lot this afternoon about another vote on this issue. Can the Prime Minister confirm that she both read and remembers the brochure that was sent to all households before the 2016 referendum, which stated in bold that this was a "once in a generation" opportunity, and that the Government would enact "what you decide"?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for bringing that document to the House's attention. It is absolutely right that when people come to look at this deal, they will remember that commitment that once people had voted, the Government would enact that vote. That is what the Government are doing.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Prime Minister has been unequivocal in denying the people a people's vote on her deal, but time and again in this House she has refused to concede that her deal makes this country poorer, compared with being a member of the European Union. If she is insistent on making my constituents and those of everyone in this House poorer, should they not be asked if no Brexit is as good as a bad Brexit?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me make it very clear to the hon. Gentleman that nobody is talking about making people poorer. What we are talking about is protecting people's jobs and livelihoods and delivering a deal that delivers on the vote of the British people. That is what this deal does.

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Is it not the case that legally the backstop can only be temporary, because it is a pathway to a future trade deal, and that therefore descriptions of being trapped in the backstop forever, or of becoming a vassal state or even, absurdly, a colony, are overblown and wrong? Should not hon. Members look at the deal, which I commend the Prime Minister for having negotiated, in the round, because it will enable us to deliver on the promise we made to the British people to implement their decision in the referendum?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend; it is important that this deal does deliver on the decision of the British people. We committed to deliver on that decision. There are various references in the withdrawal agreement that make it clear that the backstop, were it to be invoked, would only be temporary, not least the fact that the withdrawal agreement is on the legal basis of article 50, which cannot be used to establish a permanent relationship.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I was disappointed to see on Twitter the Government's timetabling for the meaningful vote, having not first had the courtesy sight of it through the usual channels. My wee sister is due to give birth to her first child on 25 May. What is the Prime Minister's message to that child? Will they be a European citizen, and can she honestly say that their life chances and opportunities will be better under this deal than they would be if we remained in the European Union, which is what 78% of my constituents voted for?

**The Prime Minister:** May I wish the hon. Gentleman's sister well for the birth of her child? My message is simply the one that I gave earlier: I believe that there is a truly bright future for this country outside the European Union. I believe that the child will grow up with real opportunities open to them that they would not have had previously. But it is up to all of us to work to ensure that we enhance our prosperity and enhance the jobs available for people in this country so that we do have that bright future.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that although the backstop is uncomfortable for the United Kingdom, it is also uncomfortable for the European Union? It allows free and unfettered trade between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and the European Union, thereby creating a competitive advantage, which the EU is always keen to avoid. It is therefore in everyone's interests to bring the backstop to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right; the European Union does consider the backstop to be a potential area of competitive advantage for the United Kingdom, which is why it is in the interests of both sides, were it to be invoked, to bring it to an end as quickly as possible.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for her statement. She told the House that the withdrawal agreement

“protects the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and UK citizens living in the EU, so they can carry on living their lives as before.”

Does that mean that UK citizens in receipt of state pensions in the EU will have those uprated annually, as state pension holders in this country will, and will that continue after the transition period?

**The Prime Minister:** If the hon. Gentleman looks at the political declaration, he will see that it contains a reference to the need still to negotiate some of the arrangements in relation to certain benefits, such as pensions, under the future trading relationship.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for all her work and for her statement? At least 80% of the UK's economy is services, and we know that the European Union has still not completed the single market in services after 25 years. In her statement she spoke about liberalising the trade in services well beyond WTO commitments and building on recent EU free trade agreements. In relation to services, how much difference does she think there will be between what we have at the moment and what we will be able to negotiate under the political declaration?

**The Prime Minister:** The key element of the political declaration is that, first, it gives us greater freedom to negotiate on services, because this is an area, as my hon. Friend says, where the single market has not been developed by the European Union. Secondly, it is important—again, this was hard fought for—to get a recognition that, in relation to services, the future relationship could go beyond those that existed in other free trade agreements, because this is an area that has not been well developed in other free trade agreements.

It is to the UK's advantage, of course, given the importance of services to our economy, to develop it in this relationship with the European Union, and of course with other countries around the world.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The man who wrote article 50, Lord Kerr, has said today that the characterisation of a choice between the Prime Minister's deal and defaulting to a no-deal situation—or going back to square one—is a false choice. Who is correct, the man who wrote article 50 or the Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** Article 50 is the basis on which the negotiations have been held. It was the triggering of article 50 that led to the negotiations and led to the timetable for leaving on 29 March 2019. Article 50, in itself, does not determine the nature of any future relationship with the European Union, so it is not a question of what article 50 says; it is a question of negotiating a deal. We have negotiated a deal, and it is a good deal for the UK.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend talks about the national interest, and we all have the national interest at heart, even if we do not necessarily agree with her deal, which I personally think is a halfway house that leaves us neither in nor out of the EU, with no confirmed end date. If we cannot get the free trade deal that we should be able to get, surely the best way to unite the country is to leave the EU, negotiate a deal from outside and get our country back.

**The Prime Minister:** I believe that the deal we have negotiated does enable us to do the things I am sure my hon. Friend would wish us to do—crucially, to bring an end to the jurisdiction of the ECJ in the UK; crucially, to bring an end to free movement once and for all; and to come out of those aspects of the European Union that have not provided for certain sectors of our economy, such as the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. We are negotiating a deal with a free trade area at its heart, and it goes beyond any other free trade agreement that the European Union has negotiated with other countries. It is an agreement of unprecedented ambition and depth that is being proposed for the United Kingdom.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Even if the Prime Minister gets her blind Brexit deal through Parliament—and it is a big “if”—we all know it will be only the beginning of detailed negotiations on our relationship with the rest of the EU. Given her deeply offensive comments about EU nationals and the cack-handed way she has negotiated this deal, is she not a little worried that she might be at the back of the queue when it comes to negotiating her priorities?

**The Prime Minister:** No. The commitment from both sides on negotiating the future economic partnership and future security partnership is clear in these documents.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): When we talk about issues like Gibraltar and the future of fisheries, and so on, should we not remember that it is a very direct consequence of deciding to leave the European Union that we are renegotiating all aspects of our

[James Cartlidge]

relationship with the EU? Other member states will inevitably try to advance their national interests in those negotiations. In those circumstances, surely the best way forward is to hold our nerve, instead of taking as gospel the warnings of President Macron or the claims of the socialist Spanish Prime Minister, who has regional elections just around the corner.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend brings a degree of realism. Of course, as we go into these negotiations, others will have interests that they wish to put forward and press. The whole point of negotiation is that it is the process by which we come to a result. We have resisted many of the pressures that have been put forward by member states and the European Commission in these negotiations so far, and we will continue to resist on the key issues to which my hon. Friend has referred in relation to fisheries and Gibraltar.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Many constituents have contacted me about this issue over the past week. Why does the Prime Minister think that the overwhelming majority, whether they voted to leave or remain, are urging me to vote against her deal?

**The Prime Minister:** I will continue to set out why I believe this is a good deal for the United Kingdom. I have set that out in answer to a number of questions in the Chamber this afternoon, and I will continue to do so.

**David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): In response to my right hon. Friend's statement, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) claimed—predictably, I must say—that Scottish fishermen are being sold out somehow.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): That is what the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) said.

**David Duguid:** Not in the document. According to the chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, this deal does enable the UK to become

“an independent Coastal State with full, unfettered sovereignty over our waters and natural resources.”

Whom should I tell my constituents to believe?

**The Prime Minister:** I suspect the Scottish Fishermen's Federation knows the interests of Scottish fishermen, and how those interests should be provided for, rather better than the SNP does.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In this withdrawal agreement document, article 5 of the protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, on the common travel area, confirms that

“associated rights and privileges can continue...in particular with respect to free movement for Union citizens and their family members, irrespective of their nationality, to, from and within Ireland.”

Surely, this either means that free movement will continue via Northern Ireland, or there will be a border in the Irish sea and people travelling from Northern Ireland will be subjected to extra checks.

**The Prime Minister:** The common travel area is an arrangement with Ireland that has been in place since

the 1920s. It is absolutely right that we maintain that common travel area. That has been provided for in the withdrawal agreement, and it is the right thing to do.

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister for her determination to reach agreement between the UK and the EU in this agreement. In particular, I welcome the statement in the political declaration in relation to foreign, security and defence policy that the United Kingdom and the EU will be champions for a rules-based international order. Does she agree that one of the biggest opportunities for the UK, as we leave the European Union, is precisely to become that champion for a rules-based international order, leveraging our hard power and soft power around the world?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We will, indeed, be that champion for the rules-based international order. I have been making that point in a number of forums, and I expect to continue to do so when I attend the G20 later this week.

**Hugh Gaffney** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Looking at the people behind the Prime Minister—there were many more of them earlier—it is obvious why she wants to hit the road and get out of this place. If she has not yet booked her ticket, I am happy to provide a one-way ticket. Can she confirm where and when she will meet the leaders of Britain's trade unions, the representatives of the working people across the United Kingdom? They might be able to give her some tips on negotiation.

**The Prime Minister:** We have had discussions throughout the process with the trade unions, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union met Frances O'Grady very recently.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), I have been knocking on doors in my constituency, and voters in Rugby and Bulkington have told me that one of the key reasons why they voted to leave was to give the UK the ability to control immigration. And businesses, especially those in manufacturing, have said that to keep jobs once we have left, it is vital to retain our just-in-time supply chains. Will the Prime Minister confirm that her agreement delivers on both those important issues?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that confirmation. Businesses are very clear about the importance of maintaining those just-in-time supply chains. Similarly, of course, many constituents are concerned to ensure that we are able to make decisions for ourselves about who should be migrating to the United Kingdom without having that free movement. This deal delivers on both.

**Drew Hendry:** The Prime Minister repeats again and again that this is a good deal, but not only has she failed to convince this House but the National Institute of Economic and Social Research says that, under her plan, tax revenue would fall by 1.5% to 2% annually—that is £18 billion to £23 billion less for public services.

How does she account for the gap between her side of a bus-plus-plus spending promises for the NHS and this reality?

**The Prime Minister:** The spending promises on the NHS were clearly dealt with at the Budget in November.

**Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con):** When we consider this important issue, there will always be risks and there will always be trade-offs. When I assess the options in front of me, I consider that the Prime Minister's deal—the one she has gone and fought hard for with the European Union—does honour the referendum: it makes sure that we get control of our borders, our money and our laws. It may not be an easy way to get there, but there was never going to be an easy way. I have been listening since the start of her statement, and I have heard many Opposition Members, and one or two Conservative Members, say that we should rerun the people's vote of 2016. Can she reassure me that we will not countenance that because, in all this, it is a real risk to democracy?

**The Prime Minister:** First, may I apologise to the House because I think I just made a reference, as I did earlier, to the Budget being in November, and in fact it was in October? My hon. Friend is absolutely right; everybody needs to look at what is going to deliver on the vote of the British people. Saying to the British people, as some people who talk about a second referendum are, in a sense, doing, "You got the answer wrong. You've got to think again," is not what we should be doing. Some 80% of the votes cast at the last general election were for parties that stood on manifesto commitments to deliver on the vote of the British people and deliver Brexit, and we should do just that.

**Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab):** Given everything that has been said today, is the right hon. Lady, like her predecessor, still not for turning?

**The Prime Minister:** I believe this is a good deal, and I continue to believe it is a good deal.

**Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con):** In 2014, I campaigned head, heart, body and soul to keep this United Kingdom together. The Northern Irish backstop would leave Northern Ireland in a separate regulatory regime. Brussels would have more say over trade and rules on goods in Northern Ireland than the UK Parliament. Northern Ireland would be left under the jurisdiction of a foreign court, and that undermines the UK internal market. As a Scottish Unionist, I cannot stand by and watch a nation within our United Kingdom be left behind. Does my right hon. Friend not share my concern that this backstop could fuel the arguments of nationalists in this country and therefore threaten to break up our precious United Kingdom?

**The Prime Minister:** Like my hon. Friend, I am a passionate Unionist, and I believe in protecting the integrity of our United Kingdom. He has raised issues and I have spoken before in this Chamber about this question of the regulatory differences between Northern Ireland and Great Britain—some exist already—and, in a temporary backstop period, the commitments that could be given by the Government to ensure that there was not regulatory divergence and we did see that regulatory similarity with Great Britain and Northern

Ireland. In fact, there are many who consider that the Northern Ireland backstop is an advantage to businesses in Northern Ireland, which is one of the reasons why the EU would not want us to be kept in the backstop. I can assure him that I am passionately in favour of the Union and will do everything I can to protect it.

**Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP):** I am told that the repetition is not a vice, so may I ask the Prime Minister, in the last two weeks, what discussions have taken place on future arrangements in relation to the European health insurance card? On behalf of the 27 million UK citizens who have such a card, will she tell us what she expects the status of that card to be in January 2021?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman might care to look at the healthcare Bill that has had its Second Reading and is before this Parliament, which deals with these issues of healthcare.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** I declare an interest, as a chair of the all-party group on animal welfare. Under the agreement reached between the British Government and the EU yesterday in Brussels, would it be possible for this country unilaterally to end live animal exports for slaughter?

**The Prime Minister:** The answer is that, obviously, there are aspects of the future relationship where the detailed determination will be coming in. At the heart of my hon. Friend's question is the extent to which we wish to continue with the common rulebook on these sorts of matters. I would also remind him that I, and the Government, have been clear that we want to maintain high animal welfare standards in this country and, indeed, enhance them.

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** May I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph 54 of the political declaration, which refers to social security arrangements, and ask what assessment the Government have made of the numbers involved? What estimate has been made of the cost to the British taxpayer?

**The Prime Minister:** This reference is exactly what I was thinking of when I responded to an earlier question in relation, for example, to pension payments that might take place once we have left the EU. As my hon. Friend will see from this, this matter is yet to be fully addressed within the future negotiations. Obviously, we will be looking at exactly the issues he has raised in doing so.

**Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con):** I pay tribute to the Prime Minister's resilience in standing at the Dispatch Box for so long this afternoon—it has been a tour de force. The bitter truth is that more than half of Conservative Back Benchers have indicated that we will not be able to support the withdrawal agreement. There is no shame in proposing her deal to the House next month, but there would be in failing to ensure that, in parallel, comprehensive preparations for an exit on WTO terms are being made. Every day matters, and I do not believe the intensity that there should be has yet been seen to get us ready for that scenario. Will she please accelerate those preparations so that we can be ready for any eventuality?

**The Prime Minister:** I hope I can give some reassurance to my hon. Friend: as I said in the House last week, it is clear that we are looking ahead to a vote in this House on these matters and so we continue with our no-deal preparations.

**Mr Speaker:** Prime Minister, colleagues, thank you.

## Point of Order

6.6 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like your advice about the use of official parliamentary recordings of proceedings of this House. On Thursday, the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) posted a video clip of an exchange at business questions involving me and the Leader of the House. The clip was heavily edited to give a false and erroneous impression about the nature of the exchange and to draw a false conclusion—one that was not made when I made that contribution in the House. The terms and conditions on the use of recorded parliamentary material clearly say that no one can “alter” the video and audio of the recording “in any way”, and Members have to agree to that as part of the terms of use. This exchange was clearly altered, and it was altered to give a false impression of what transpired. More than 40,000 people have already seen this heavily edited clip. I have contacted the hon. Gentleman and have given him the opportunity to take it down voluntarily—an offer he has refused. How, therefore, can he be obliged and compelled to take this clip down?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me notice of this point of order. It is important that colleagues take care not to give a misleading impression of proceedings by selective editing or unrepresentative quotation, either of video content or of *Hansard*. I do not, however, think the Chair can act or be expected to act as an immediate arbiter of cases brought to its attention—I refer to the Chair as a collective—to determine whether a misleading impression has or has not been created, deliberately or otherwise. I have always stressed that it is for Members to take responsibility for their actions and for what is done on their behalf. A great many right hon. and hon. Members make use of the video clipping tool to download extracts from our debates, and this helps bring our proceedings to life. I would encourage them to exercise care when they do so, although I accept—I do not know whether he does and I am not debating the point with him here and now—that some editing must be allowed if these extracts are to be of a manageable length for social media purposes. It is really not satisfactory—I am not criticising the hon. Gentleman; I understand his frustration—for these matters repeatedly to be brought to the attention of the Chair when the Chair has no power to act. Members must, if I may politely say so, treat others as they would wish themselves to be treated. We will leave it there for now.

## RAF Centenary

6.9 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):**

I beg to move,

That this House has considered the 100 year anniversary of the Royal Air Force.

I am delighted that we have this opportunity to hold this debate. As a former Chief Whip, I would always say that all the legislation that the Government bring into the House is excellent legislation, but it is probably fair to say that some pieces of legislation are better than others, and I think we would all say that this House's decision to create the Royal Air Force was one of its finest moments. It is almost 99 years to the day since Lord Trenchard issued his memorandum on the permanent organisation of the Royal Air Force, with a £15 million provision approved by the Cabinet. I must confess that I rather wish that £15 million would go as far for our armed forces today as it did 99 years ago. In his memorandum, Lord Trenchard talked about the need to "concentrate attention...laying the foundations of a highly-trained and efficient force".

He went on to say that

"to make an Air Force worthy of the name, we must create an Air Force spirit, or rather foster this spirit...by every means in our power."

That Air Force spirit has been at the core throughout the first 100 years and remains at the core of the Royal Air Force at the start of its second century.

Under the banner of RAF100, the Royal Air Force has delivered a superb campaign to celebrate reaching this important anniversary. More than 165,000 people have visited six aircraft tour venues throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where they have had the chance to see numerous aircraft, including Spitfires, Harriers and Typhoons, and to meet the incredible people who flew them and who fly them. I very much hope that colleagues will join me in congratulating all those who have gone over and above to make this year such a success. I particularly thank Sir Stephen Hillier, the Chief of the Air Staff, who has done so much to make this such a memorable year for this service. Approximately £3 million has been raised as part of the 100th anniversary celebrations, and that money will now be invested in veterans and young people, as well as those who continue to serve in our Royal Air Force. This is an appropriate moment to thank our RAF charities, including the RAF Association, the RAF Benevolent Fund, the RAF Charitable Trust and the RAF Museum, which work tirelessly to support RAF service personnel past and present.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I remind the House that my daughter is a serving officer in the Royal Air Force.

Further to what the Secretary of State said, the gist of which I fully support, throughout Britain, we still have a lot of redundant buildings of historical importance, particularly in respect of the second and the first world wars. Is the Secretary of State willing to go as far as to say that perhaps we can expand on what he said in respect of tourist attractions and ways of raising money from pleased tourists to help exactly the charities that he has mentioned?

**Gavin Williamson:** I would certainly be happy to look into that. We should be proud of the RAF's heritage: not only its planes but the many buildings that were such a vital part of the infrastructure throughout the RAF's development.

We have had a great opportunity to celebrate more and more of what the RAF has done over the past 100 years. It is incredible to think that, in the summer of 1917, as German Zeppelins silently bombarded London, our RAF did not even exist, yet a few months later the Air Force (Constitution) Act 1917 was passed. It has not looked back since its formation in April 1918. It was this House that created the Royal Air Force and it is fitting that it is this House that marks the Royal Air Force's success.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that the formation of the Royal Air Force was not the start of our airborne capability, and that the Royal Air Force of course had its provenance in the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps, which were operational throughout the great war, to great effect?

**Gavin Williamson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that the Royal Air Force was born out of many other organisations, which contributed so many of the men and so much of the ingenuity and ethos to the new organisation. It is from those different strands that the RAF has been built into the successful organisation that we see today.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way because he gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to my uncle, Harold Paisley, who joined the RAF in 1939, aged 16. When they found out that he had misrepresented his age, he was subsequently put out, and he ended up in the merchant navy instead.

Each year, the Air Waves show takes place in Portrush in East Londonderry. It is one of the biggest air shows in the United Kingdom and it is also the single largest recruitment air show for the RAF. Will the Secretary of State ensure that it continues to get support and endorsement from the RAF each year, so that we can continue to recruit Ulstermen and women into the RAF?

**Gavin Williamson:** Northern Ireland has always played an important role in all our three services, contributing far more men and women to our armed forces, both regulars and reserves, as a proportion of its population than any other part of the United Kingdom. The Royal Air Force is absolutely committed to the support of future air shows. We have a clear understanding of their value in telling the story of what the Royal Air Force does.

Let us take this opportunity to look back to a century ago, when the Royal Air Force was mapping the trenches and directing allied artillery to deliver victory in the great war. In our darkest hour in the second world war, the RAF was our last line of defence against the Luftwaffe. The battle of Britain cemented the RAF's reputation, the reputation of the few: the dashing, daring, dogged determination of the Royal Air Force to protect and preserve our values and our nation. Our debt to the RAF continued throughout the chill of the cold war. Theirs were the Vulcan bombers that carried our ultimate

[Gavin Williamson]

deterrent and theirs were the transport aircraft that delivered essential aid to the people of West Berlin 70 years ago in that famous airlift, which was the first major humanitarian exercise in modern history. In 1982, the Royal Air Force displayed incredible ingenuity to project strategic air power over thousands of miles to help and support the liberation of the Falkland Islands.

The RAF's flagship event, which we all witnessed this year, brought this history powerfully home to us all. Like many, not just in the House but throughout the country, I watched the flypast in awe. We heard the unmistakable sound of Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancasters and the thunderous roar of the F-35s, Tornados and Typhoons, as we celebrated not just 100 years of the organisation's existence, but 100 years of fighting spirit and of a nation coming together. We saw those crowds on the Mall—the men and women who had come to say their thank you to their Royal Air Force. We as a nation truly do owe the RAF a great debt.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is making an important and powerful speech. The celebrations were also recognised in my constituency, which interestingly has played a key role in the RAF's development, with Hanworth air park being a hub for the Air Ministry and home to the Whitehead Aircraft Company and more. Does he agree that this year we should celebrate that history and how many parts of the country played huge parts in it, and that we should recognise the work of, for example, Katy Cox, Richard Griffiths and others from the Friends of Hanworth Park House to bring that history to life?

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady makes a powerful point. The RAF is more than just the service itself. It is all those people who contribute to it so much. It is the businesses that help to create these amazing flying machines, which have been so instrumental in defending Britain repeatedly in the past and will be so again. I pay tribute to those who bring that to life. I take this opportunity to mention the Boulton Paul Aircraft Company, which was in my constituency and produced the Defiant aircraft during the second world war, and the many people of the Boulton Paul Aircraft Society who have kept alive not only the skills of aircraft production but the contribution by so many people across the west midlands and the country to the Royal Air Force.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State makes a point about the evolution of technology over the past century. It is amazing to think that it was only 10 years from the first flight of the Lancaster bomber to the first flight of the Vulcan. The level of evolution in that period is astonishing in today's terms. In addition, the cost of these technologies has increased exponentially over the past century. His Department normally calculates defence inflation. How can he properly assess the true cost of these equipment programmes? Can he commit to reinstating defence inflation, so that we can properly plan to give our wonderful aircraft industry the certainty that it needs for the future?

**Gavin Williamson:** I will touch on the great future of our aircraft manufacturing industry later in my speech, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have an

amazing heritage. We have wonderful RAF museums in London and in Cosford, Shropshire, which are brilliant examples of the ingenuity we have in this country. That is certainly something that, as a Department, we are very much trying to encourage and to foster, working hand in glove with industry.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Most people in this House will have a relative who served in the RAF one way or another over the past 100 years. I am sure that the Secretary of State will also recall that Coventry, for example, was a target during the war for German bombers because aircraft engines were manufactured in Coventry. I am sure that he knows that, as in the rest of the west midlands, there were targets in Birmingham—the supply chain was a target there. All in all, people have paid a heavy price and we owe a lot to the RAF, particularly during the war and, in relation to some of the wounds that those pilots sustained, in the development of plastic surgery.

**Gavin Williamson:** What we have always been so incredibly successful at is harnessing the whole of industry for our war effort, and there is no greater example of that than in the second world war. My grandfather was a machinist in Coventry during those bombing raids. Coventry was heavily targeted because of its manufacturing expertise and prowess, which were so vital to our war effort. That expertise is something that we very much continue going forward. Let me take the opportunity to comment—

**Seema Malhotra:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Gavin Williamson:** If the hon. Lady will forgive me for making a little bit of—[*Interruption.*] I am far too soft. I have melted. I give way to the hon. Lady.

**Seema Malhotra:** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. RAF Cosford has been mentioned. I want to put on record my long-standing thanks to RAF Cosford because, when I did a master's in information technology at Aston University, I did a project at RAF Cosford. Its contribution to bringing on new skills and talent and connecting others with our armed forces is a tribute to it. I put on record my thanks.

**Gavin Williamson:** I know that everyone at RAF Cosford will be greatly appreciative of those thanks. It is great to be able to name-check such a wonderful RAF base that is making such an impact in terms of training and skills for future generations in our Royal Air Force.

What truly makes the RAF so remarkable is that, since 1990, it has been continuously deployed on overseas operations. RAF100 has also been a chance to celebrate that continuing contribution to defence and the security that the RAF provides to our nation. As we speak in this Chamber, the RAF is involved in campaigns across 23 countries and five continents, working closely with our NATO allies. It has protected Baltic skies over the Black sea and it will soon be over Icelandic skies. It is all about protecting those nations and also Britain from all those who wish to do us harm—nations that are becoming more aggressive and more assertive in their international view and their willingness to put pressure on their neighbours.

Further afield, our RAF is supporting the French counter-terrorism mission in Mali, and RAF Regiment personnel are training their counterparts in Nigeria to combat the menace of Boko Haram. Following the devastating hurricanes in the Caribbean last year, who did we turn to? We turned to the Royal Air Force, which flew more than 850 tonnes of vital freight, including water, rations and shelters to help local people.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I would like to pay tribute to my own father for his service in the second world war, and say that the Secretary of State is making an important point about the service provided by so many other nations, particularly in the second world war—the Poles, the Belgians, the Canadians, the Kiwis, the Australians, the US and so many others. We still see that. The RAF has performed such an important role that over the decades.

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is a truly international service. It is absolutely fitting that he mentions so many of those nations that provided an instrumental part of our effort not just to defend Britain, but to defend the values that interweave all our nations together. I had the privilege of being in Poland and meeting some of those veterans who had served for Britain in our services. The pride that they had in their contribution was truly uplifting. It is a debt that I hope this nation will never ever forget, and I do not believe that it ever will. It is a very important part of our tradition.

I am slightly desperate to see the film “Hurricane”. I am not sure whether any Members have had the opportunity to see it. I tried to persuade my wife to come with me to the cinema, but she was not convinced. However, I am looking forward to it being released on DVD, so that I can purchase it.

**Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. On the subject of the Hurricane, I wondered whether I could bring up the iconic Spitfire. I know that he has spoken about the Battle of Britain. The iconic Spitfire was, of course, designed, built and test flown in Southampton. Would this year, of all years, be a good time to have a lasting memorial, supported by Government, to the iconic Spitfire in its hometown of Southampton?

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Stoke-on-Trent.

**Gavin Williamson:** Hampshire made a great contribution to the war effort, with the Supermarine company’s invention, but we must not forget the brilliant people behind it and, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the great man who did so much with regard to the design of the Spitfire came from Stoke-on-Trent. It would be brilliant to have such fitting monuments, and I would support my hon. Friend in his representations to the Treasury, but I very much hope that the money comes out of other people’s budgets, as against my own, and I am sure that he will appreciate why.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) tried to appropriate the history of Stoke-on-Trent. Surely the Defence Secretary would like to see that

memorial to the Spitfire in the county of Staffordshire, which we both have the pleasure of representing. If that is the case, I will happily join him in lobbying the Treasury immediately.

**Gavin Williamson:** I had the great privilege of being in Stoke-on-Trent with my old friend, Councillor Abi Brown, to look at what has been done in celebrating Stoke-on-Trent’s contribution to the Spitfire. I am personally of the view that, if there is a funding source that is separate from the Ministry of Defence, there should be monuments to the Spitfire right across the nation and also monuments to the Lancaster, the Hurricane and to the many other great aircraft.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** *rose*—

**Gavin Williamson:** I feel there is a bid from Coventry here, so I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** When we talk about the development of the aircraft, we must not forget that Sir Frank Whittle, who developed the jet engine, came from Coventry.

**Gavin Williamson:** It is true that Sir Frank Whittle came from Coventry, and I think there should be many more monuments to him in Coventry.

**Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that the Secretary of State is trying to work out the link between the Hurricane, the Spitfire and Luton, but I will not lead him down that channel. I congratulate him on making the time to look back at the RAF’s proud history, but may I ask him also to reflect on its future? I was fortunate enough to be with the RAF Air Cadets of my old squadron—2465 Icknield Squadron—on Friday night for their annual prize-giving evening. I am also fortunate to have 10F, one of the founder squadrons of the air cadets, in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State confirm the RAF’s ongoing commitment to the RAF Air Cadets?

**Gavin Williamson:** Very much so; we see the cadets as a way of reaching out to future generations. Many of us in this House will have memories of speaking to our grandparents, who had such an involvement in the different services during the second world war. As that generation sadly passes away, I think of whether my children had the opportunity to be able to speak to those who saw at first hand what total war was, which my children’s generation of course will not.

The cadets are such an important part of reaching out to and inspiring the future generation. I had the great privilege of visiting the Aston University Engineering Academy in Birmingham, which has the most wonderful air cadets unit. There were boys and girls from so many different backgrounds, who were inspired to be involved in the Air Force and to make a contribution. Where they had a passion for science or engineering, they were interested in something that the RAF had given them—a sense of belonging. The RAF really puts a value on their interests and makes them feel that they are part of something that is so much bigger. I was pleased to announce that we will continue to expand the numbers of air, Army and sea cadets. We are hoping to increase the number of placements within school cadet services from 48,000 to 60,000, and we also want to do that for cadet units in the wider community.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The only cadet unit that does not get any support is the sea cadets, such as those in the Rhondda. I know that we are quite a long way from the sea in the Rhondda, but we have rivers; no, this is a serious point. The sea cadets are one of the most important youth organisations in my constituency, and they get absolutely no support other than a kind of tangential support from the Ministry of Defence. Would the Secretary of State look into at least paying the insurance bill for the sea cadets?

**Gavin Williamson:** My understanding is that we do support the sea cadets charity, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman with further detail about how we do that. We recognise the support required for all uniformed youth movements. We very much see them as a total family, and that is something that we will continue to do. I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I turn back to the Air Force.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Gavin Williamson:** I feel as if I would be doing the hon. Gentleman a massive disservice if I did not give way to him.

**Jim Shannon:** It is always a pleasure to intervene on the Secretary of State. He will recognise that Northern Ireland has a very good tradition of cadet service. The advantage of the RAF cadets, the Army cadets and the naval cadets—I have all three in my constituency—is that they transcend the political and religious divides in Northern Ireland. This is a way to look forward with hope. Does the Secretary of State recognise the good work that the cadets can do across the whole of Northern Ireland, and what they do to bring communities together?

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct to point that out. When I was last in County Fermanagh, I had the great privilege of meeting a group of air cadets, who were doing such an amazing job of bringing communities together. There has been a large change in representation within cadet units in Northern Ireland, from them wholly comprising people from a Protestant background to there now being a 70-30 split. We recognise that there is much further to go but, given the progress that has been made over the last 10 years, I hope that we will see much further progress over the next 10 years. It is certainly something about which we can feel very proud.

**Mr Sweeney:** The Secretary of State makes reference to the air cadets, who do a fantastic job spreading the social footprint of the Air Force to our communities around the UK, but we should also recognise the contribution of our university air squadrons. On Friday night, I had the pleasure of attending the annual dinner of the Military Education Committee of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, where we celebrated the university air squadron and the other service organisations in the universities. The university air squadron in Glasgow has been in existence since 1941, when it recruited over 400 airmen into the RAF as officers and pilot officers. It made a huge contribution to the war effort and continues to make a huge contribution to this day.

**Gavin Williamson:** There is a theme coming out very clearly in this debate, which is the role that the Air Force plays in inspiring future generations—whether at school, college or university—into different careers, both in the Air Force itself and in other science, technology, engineering and maths areas.

It would be remiss of us not to talk about what the Royal Air Force is doing today. As we are in this House, the Royal Air Force continuously stands vigilant to protect our skies here in the United Kingdom, but it is also taking our fight to our enemies abroad—Daesh in Iraq and Syria. The RAF has been using its skills to strike and eliminate that threat by combining precision-guided weaponry with unparalleled surveillance, intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities; flying at the highest operational tempo for over a quarter of a century; and striking more than 1,750 times. The RAF has played a pivotal role in bringing Daesh to its knees and significantly reducing its influence across the world. People sometimes think that the campaigns that the RAF is fighting are very far away from here and maybe do not have a relevance to the United Kingdom, but by dealing with that threat in Iraq and Syria, the RAF is keeping the streets of Great Britain safer.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State agree that, while we must remember the magnificent 100 years of the RAF, the best way we can pay testament to the nation and the RAF is by ensuring that the RAF and all the armed forces get sufficient funding to keep us all safe?

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the best birthday present that any service can have is probably a little bit more cash. I am sure that the Chief of the Air Staff would very much echo that.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I hope that I am not interrupting the Secretary of State in order to mention something that he is going to come to in his speech. One of the critical elements of defending this country is our rapid reaction force. Every day, that force stands on high alert for incursions into British airspace—both of adversaries and of civilian flights that might have been taken over by terrorists. It is the rapid reaction force that protects our skies across the UK every day.

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady is absolutely correct to state that the RAF is always vigilant. It is always ready to act. It is always ready to respond. Within literally a few minutes of a warning, it is up in the air defending our skies and dealing with these threats. That sense of protecting our skies has been a theme of the Royal Air Force throughout its 100-year history.

It is both humbling and inspiring to meet the extraordinary men and women who are doing this—to see their commitment, their passion and their dedication to their duty and the service that they are part of. We in this House must always do everything we can to protect them and to make sure that they always have the very best, much as the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said.

**Chris Bryant:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Gavin Williamson:** Yes, I will.

**Chris Bryant:** It is about aircraft this time. The Secretary of State will know that quite often the Russians have been flying at the edge of our airspace or sometimes just inside, and that this has seen a very significant increase in the tempo of what the RAF has had to deal with. The Russians keep on saying, “Oh no, it’s Britain that is completely breaking the rules here.” Can he just put the Russians right on this?

**Gavin Williamson:** Well, I always like to send very clear messages to the Russians. [*Laughter.*] The RAF is always right, and the RAF is protecting our skies from potential threats. That is the right thing to do, it is what we expect it to do, and it is what it will continue to do against any possible incursions.

The RAF plays a much bigger role than just in our skies. In terms of what we have been doing in NATO, the Royal Air Force has been in Romania as a key and pivotal part of its air defence. When we go to Romania and speak to Romanians, we see the real pride and sense of appreciation that they have for the role that the Royal Air Force has played. The RAF was not there just passively—it was scrambling in order to respond to potential threats that the Romanian air force was also having to deal with. This is a way of expanding our influence right across Europe and the world, because people, quite rightly, put the RAF on a pedestal as the world’s greatest air force, and they put great value and privilege on working with it. We need to exploit that more and more, not just for our strategic defence but from a prosperity angle as well.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** The Secretary of State is talking about the RAF deploying into Romania as part of NATO air policing operations. Does that not also remind us all of the vital role the RAF plays in providing a conventional deterrent, as we were saying in Defence questions earlier? We talk about our nuclear deterrent, but we are part of a key NATO conventional deterrent as well.

**Gavin Williamson:** My hon. Friend is right to point that out. This goes to show the depth and the range of roles that the RAF has to perform. People are often attracted to and talk about the fast jet capability of the Royal Air Force, but it is equally important not to forget the much wider role that it plays in terms of surveillance and reconnaissance, which is absolutely critical in dealing with the threats that we are having to manage today. There is also the ability to deliver heavy lift. We have one of the most impressive—I would go further and say the most impressive—heavy lift operations of any air force in the world. I notice my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) agreeing with that, as it is based in his constituency. No other country, whether it is Germany, Italy, Spain or France, has anything that is even vaguely comparable. The RAF is not just about our past and our present; it is very much about our future. This is about what our future Air Force looks like. We know that air power is critical to our security today, but in a darkening world, with the dangers intensifying, the RAF’s ability to project power around the globe at pace will be a vital part of our tomorrow.

We have spent a landmark year putting our formidable future Air Force plan into place. This has been about bringing to fruition the world-beating fifth generation

F-35B Lightning stealth fighters, which have been doing trials off the east coast of the United States off our Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier. The fact that we now have these aircraft stationed at RAF Marham plays an important role in making sure that Britain’s defence in the future is secured.

**Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP):** The Secretary of State has just made mention of some of the hardware that we have. Does he not agree that we have the greatest body of men and women who have been trained and are putting their lives on the line? This is about the resource of the people that we have and the training that has put them there. I represent a constituency that has a base, RAF Aldergrove, where one of the oldest squadrons of the RAF was based. It played a key role in the defence of our nation during the second world war and was instrumental in targeting, probably, the Bismarck, which was going to create a major problem for this nation, and ensuring that we had a supply from North America of all the goods that we required during the war.

**Gavin Williamson:** Yes, there is Aldergrove and so many other RAF bases in Northern Ireland. I think there were 28 RAF bases in Northern Ireland during the second world war, although I may be out by one or two. They all played a vital part in creating the air corridor from the United States to Britain and, of course, to Europe in our great war effort. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to single out the people. The people make the organisation, over and above all the aircraft and equipment that forms the Royal Air Force.

As we look forward, it is not just the F-35B Lightning aircraft that creates such an exciting opportunity for what our Royal Air Force will do—it is also about how we continue to develop our capabilities. These capabilities are going to be strengthened by two additional Typhoon squadrons—one at RAF Coningsby, and one at RAF Lossiemouth, securing the RAF’s enduring presence in Scotland and generating growth in the local area. By 2020, Lossiemouth will be home not just to more Typhoons but to the new P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, allowing us to defend thousands of miles of ocean alongside our allies the United States and the Norwegians.

**Gareth Snell:** The Secretary of State rightly points out that the future of the Air Force will depend on the F-35s—As, Bs and Cs—as well as our carrier strike group, but he will also know that there is a £7 billion hole over the course of the next 10-year defence equipment plan. How does he intend to fill that hole in order to achieve what he sets out, which we all agree with, and what more can we do to help him get out of the Treasury the money that he needs?

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman is trying to tempt me. I am incredibly encouraged by the fact that we have a defence budget that last year sat at £36 billion and next year will sit at £39 billion. This is a real commitment to and investment in our future capabilities. We have already taken out £9.5 billion in terms of efficiencies, and we will continue to look at how we can do more on that going forward. We do recognise the importance of investing, and that is why we are so proud that we have a rising defence budget and the opportunity to invest in new capabilities.

[Gavin Williamson]

But this is also about looking at how we do things slightly differently. How do we proceed as we invest in new technologies? We have seen a divergence in the costs of military technologies as they rise exponentially higher than those of commercial technologies. How can we start to bridge that gap and bring down some of the costs of these technologies? It will be important to recognise that more new technologies are becoming available. We are upgrading our Reaper remotely piloted air system with the Protector, which will give the RAF unrivalled intelligence-gathering ability and more than 40 hours of endurance. We will be looking at different types of ability to bring the fight to our enemies. A large part of that will be not only F-35s and Typhoons, but unmanned aerial vehicles that will be able to do surveillance and bring strike capability.

**Seema Malhotra:** The Secretary of State is outlining some of the very important work going on to future proof the RAF and ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Any change that is undertaken requires those who are leading the change and supporting it from within, but there is a deficit in the full strength of the RAF at the moment in terms of numbers, and there are concerns about morale in some of the personnel statistics. Does he agree that support should be given to ensure that morale remains high and that there is sufficient recruitment of people with the skills needed for the future?

**Gavin Williamson:** I take on board the hon. Lady's comments. I am not sure whether this has been released or if I am breaking some sort of cross-Government embargo, but apparently recent surveys show that those in the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces have the most positive attitude out of all Government Departments—more so than the Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and all the others. That shows that there is a real sense of purpose and a very positive attitude about what we are achieving.

I know that the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) will set out a very positive view and vision of our armed forces and our RAF. We see an RAF that is creating two new Typhoon squadrons and new Lightning squadrons and investing in new technologies, drone capability, heavy lift, Poseidon and all the things that will be so vital for a vibrant future Air Force. We can be incredibly optimistic about that. We are sometimes in danger in this country of talking down what we are achieving; I would not accuse the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) of doing that, but we should focus on the positives and the incredibly bright future of our Air Force.

As we look to the future, the sky is no longer the limit for our Royal Air Force. Earlier this year, I announced that it had taken command and control of the UK's space operations, defending our space assets and infrastructure, alongside our allies and partners. As I say, we are lifting our eyes even further than just the sky. In early 2018, the RAF launched a space-based imaging satellite, Carbonite-2, allowing us to take high-resolution colour pictures and video from space. The launch was an important step in integrating the RAF's ground, air and space capabilities.

But if our Royal Air Force is to keep ahead of our adversaries, we must look not years but decades into the future. Besides investing more than £2 billion by 2025 in

Typhoon and future combat air systems, we have launched our combat air strategy. Designed to preserve our national advantage, it will keep us at the cutting edge of air power for years to come. Significantly, we unveiled at Farnborough this summer the Tempest jet fighter concept demonstrator—an aircraft with sixth-generation capabilities.

It is that investment and vision that will keep Britain at the cutting edge in terms of capabilities, bringing great benefits to not only the Royal Air Force but British industry, which is investing. We need to see Britain investing in these new capabilities to keep that cutting edge. The air sector is a great success in terms of our ability to export worldwide. In the last year, we have secured a £6 billion order from Qatar for Typhoon and Hawk trainers. That is vital for jobs and prosperity long into the future.

Anyone who has studied the RAF will know that our aircraft are only as good as the people who pilot them and the skilled crews that support them. We must keep doing everything in our power to inspire and attract a new generation of aviators and engineers. Britain's first air chief, Hugh Trenchard, once famously appealed for those with "mathematical genius", "literary genius", "scientific brain", "initiative" and "action" to come to the RAF. Today we continue that tradition, following in his flightpath. Not only is every branch of the RAF now open to women, including ground close combat units such as the RAF Regiment, but we are creating new RAF training, education and apprenticeship systems for the next century, with training academies planned around the United Kingdom. Let us not forget that our armed forces are the biggest employer of apprentices of any organisation in this country, with more than 20,000 apprentices employed in our armed forces.

But we must do more to enthuse. Our ranks have included incredible flying aces like Johnnie Johnson and remarkable inventors like turbo-jet pioneer Frank Whittle. We must tell their story. In 2018, once more under the banner of RAF100, we delivered the largest science, technology, engineering and maths programme of any Government Department, bringing the wonders of aerospace and science to more than 1.6 million young people. Who knows? The next Johnson or Whittle might have been among those 1.6 million young people, being inspired to contribute to our Air Force and aerospace sector.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the Secretary of State for being even more generous than he was last time. On the subject of STEM, he may not be aware that in Stoke-on-Trent, the home of the Spitfire, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and I hosted a free science fair over two days for 1,200 local schoolchildren, with the help of Staffordshire University. Does he agree that that sort of partnership working with higher education and further education in our communities, under the RAF100 banner, shows some of the best parts of our RAF and what we can do together?

**Gavin Williamson:** I absolutely agree. It is great how we can get the message out by working with partners, as the hon. Gentleman describes. It is great to see that success has many fathers in terms of the Spitfire; I am waiting for other cities to claim parentage of it.

RAF100 was never meant to be a celebration by the Royal Air Force for the Royal Air Force. It was meant to be a celebration for all people of all generations and

all walks of life, reaching not only across the United Kingdom but right across the world, because it is truly a global service. RAF100 was meant to be a celebration of what the British people are capable of and a powerful reminder of what we can still achieve tomorrow. In that, it has succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of those who created the RAF 100 years ago. As we look to spread our wings and become a truly global Britain, it has inspired our nation to soar to ever greater heights.

I hope the whole House will join me in thanking the Royal Air Force and all those who have served and continue to serve in it for everything they have done on behalf of our nation's defence, and wishing them every success in their second century. The Royal Air Force's famous motto has surely never seemed more apt—"Through adversity to the stars".

6.59 pm

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): Before I begin what I intend to make a very positive and constructive contribution to this debate, I must put on record my concern and that of other hon. Members about the disgracefully short notice for this debate. It is not as though we have not known for some time that 2018 was the centenary of the RAF—100 years in fact—but to give only one parliamentary day's notice was very discourteous to Members. I hope that the Government will do better in future.

It is a real pleasure to open this debate for the Opposition and to celebrate 100 years of our Royal Air Force. I will try not to repeat too many of the Secretary of State's remarks, but we in the Opposition are in a lot of agreement with him on this topic. In those 100 years, the brave, dedicated men and women of our Royal Air Force have worked tirelessly and made sacrifices—in some cases, the ultimate sacrifice—to keep us safe and to protect our freedom.

Although we are marking 100 years since the creation of the Royal Air Force, it did not come from nowhere. I would like to take a few minutes to look at what was happening before 1918. During the past four years, as we have reflected on the events of the first world war, the dominant image for most people has been that of the trenches on the western front—not least because so many families in all our communities have been able to trace family members who served in the Army on the western front. There has been some mention of the war at sea. In the Parc Howard Museum in Llanelli, we have an exhibition on the war at sea. We have talked about the blockade of Germany and the relentless attacks on ships bringing supplies to Britain. Indeed, we had a parliamentary debate on the battle of Jutland.

Many people are much less aware of the use of air power during the first world war. They tend to associate it much more with the second world war and, of course, with the outstanding performance of the Royal Air Force in the battle of Britain. However, the use of air power in combat goes back longer than one might think. Indeed, the use of a tethered air balloon for reconnaissance—to get a better view of what was happening on the ground—dates right back to the American civil war in the 1860s. Already during world war one, aircraft were used in many ways that we would recognise today—for reconnaissance, air combat, home defence, anti-submarine warfare and bombing—and they even took off from an

aircraft carrier, with HMS Furious being the first aircraft carrier. The war also saw the further development of the use of wireless communication, aerial photography, tactics and organisation.

As the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) has mentioned, aircraft were flown by the intrepid members of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. They dealt with all the hazards of a relatively new and untried technology and the vagaries of weather, even before encountering the dangers of a mission. By the end of the war, that resulted in a combined total of some 9,300 killed or missing and some 7,000 wounded from the RFC, the RNAS and, subsequently, the RAF. We acknowledge their bravery and sacrifice.

This year, as has been mentioned, we have indeed enjoyed some spectacular events as part of the RAF100 celebrations, which have really commemorated, celebrated and inspired. I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to all those who have been involved in their preparation and execution. Up and down the country, the public have really appreciated the events, and a huge effort has been made to ensure that they have been truly open to the public. In one event in Cardiff, we had the flypast of a Lancaster bomber. We also had a fabulous display, in which the public could participate, with the opportunity to speak and ask questions about what they saw. Here in Parliament, we all enjoyed the RAF100 flypast, with the amazing participation of 100 aircraft.

The national Armed Forces Day event was held this year in Llandudno, where, being in Wales, we were of course blessed with perfect weather. The RAF pilots put on a spectacular air display, including by drawing a heart shape and of course the number 100 with their smoke trails.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is it appropriate also to remember all those men and women who actually produced those aircraft? I am particularly thinking of the women at Broughton, who still hold the world record for building a Wellington bomber in 24 hours.

**Nia Griffith:** Indeed. My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. The contribution during the second world war of women in the construction of aircraft, with the skills they obviously had and developed, was absolutely magnificent, and I think very much overlooked. As he says, they actually broke the record with the most amazing construction work at Broughton.

I visited Broughton during the RAF100 celebrations. I was at Raytheon in Broughton on the 38th day of the RAF100 baton relay. The baton had been carried up Snowdon the previous day and it was on its way to the Defence Electronics and Components Agency at Sealand. I was very pleased to be there because north Wales has such strong links with the RAF. It was of course a north Walian Prime Minister, Lloyd George, who established the RAF. It was through his initiative and determination to secure victory in world war one that the RAF, the world's first independent air force, was created on 1 April 1918.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I hope you will indulge me, Mr Deputy Speaker, with a little more latitude than is normal on the length of this intervention. My paternal grandfather, Arthur Albert Sherriff, died

[Paula Sherriff]

on 1 February 1945—he was in a Lancaster bomber—leaving my dad, who was two years old at the time. My grandma was in the cinema with a friend when she was called out and given the telegram saying that her husband was missing in action. Arthur Sherriff was later awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal, the DFM, posthumously, for his actions in a previous raid, when he had been shot in the shoulder but had continued the mission and brought the plane down safely. Will my hon. Friend join me in remembering the brave men and women—men like my grandfather, whom I sadly never got to know—and all those who made the ultimate sacrifice in fighting for the freedom that we enjoy today?

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Nia Griffith:** I thank my hon. Friend for sharing that with the House. Indeed, we would all like to pay tribute to her grandfather and all those who sacrificed their lives in that way.

I have to say that Dewsbury is not in north Wales; I will now return to my comments about north Wales. Lionel Wilmot Rees VC from Caernarfon was the first pilot to be sent to serve in a designated fighter squadron; it could be argued, especially by those in Caernarfon, that he was the first fighter pilot. North Wales has also been a hub of aerospace engineering. It remains so today, and will I hope remain so for a long time to come.

There has been a very long-standing relationship between the RAF and industrial partners. It has been encouraging to see the excellent work done for the RAF100 programme, through partnerships with industry and educational establishments, to promote the importance of STEM subjects to children and young people and to inspire them to consider careers in this sector. It is particularly important that we make young women, as well as young men, aware of these opportunities.

In my own constituency, my Assembly Member, Lee Waters, and I have used the landing of Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, in my constituency on 18 June 1928—albeit by accident, as she was supposed to land in Southampton—as an opportunity to establish an Amelia Earhart Day to provide a chance for girls from local primary schools to participate in activities to inspire them to consider a career in science or technology.

Of course, women have made a very significant contribution to our Air Force, and I want to pay particular tribute to them. The Women's Royal Air Force was formed in April 1918, and reformed again just before the second world war as the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Women played a vital role in the Air Transport Auxiliary in world war two, ferrying aircraft across the country often in hazardous conditions.

Today, the RAF is outpacing the other two services on female personnel, with women making up 14% of regulars and 20% of reservists, compared with 15% and 13% for the maritime and Army reserves respectively. Not only that, but the RAF has the largest proportion of female officers: 16% of regular officers and 22% of reserve officers in the RAF are women. The current target for women in the armed forces is 15% by 2020, but the RAF plans to raise its target to 20%. And, of course, the RAF gave us the first female military two star, Air Vice-Marshal Elaine West.

As we celebrate RAF100, let us also pay tribute to the current work of the RAF in the complex task of defending our shores in the modern world. I thank the commander of RAF Valley, Group Captain Nick Tucker-Lowe, for a very informative visit to Valley to see the crucial work that he and his team do in training the UK's next generation of world-class fighter pilots. I have also had the privilege of visiting RAF Akrotiri, where I met members of the RAF working relentless shifts to defeat Daesh and liberate Mosul and the surrounding areas, working in an extremely complex environment and taking the utmost care to avoid civilian casualties.

The Government have made progress in recognising participation in Operation Shader in the awarding of medals, but there is still concern about the criteria and whether there could be broader recognition of personnel. I wonder whether the Secretary of State would be open to looking at this again.

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. I was very proud that we were able to open up Operation Shader to medallic recognition, but we are conscious that we need to consider this further, and other Ministers and I are looking at it closely, so I thank her for raising it.

**Nia Griffith:** I thank the Secretary of State for that welcome response.

As if we needed any reminder, yet again in the last 24 hours we have been reminded of the vital role that the RAF is playing in Romania as part of NATO's enhanced air policing to deter Russian aggression and improve security in south-east Europe. We must acknowledge also our gratitude to the quick reaction alert teams, who are in constant readiness to protect our skies.

The RAF has a distinguished past, and we as politicians have a responsibility to ensure it has the fully trained staff and equipment needed to defend our shores in the future, but the National Audit Office has found that among the redundancies made by the Secretary of State's predecessors between 2010 and 2015 were air crew trades—specialisms that now have shortfalls. Furthermore, the 2015 strategic defence and security review made several commitments that increased the need for pilots, and the RAF was approximately 22% below its requirement for pilots in April 2017. The RAF therefore needs to train 180 pilots each year to meet the commitments announced in the SDSR, but it is unable to train more than 132 each year at present. What strategies is the Department employing to recruit and retain the brightest and best and to increase the diversity of recruits to ensure that talent is not being overlooked? In particular, what is the Secretary of State doing to increase the number of pilots being trained?

It is disappointing that the Government's decision to scrap the Nimrod without a replacement has left us dependent on allies for submarine surveillance, so can the Secretary of State update us on when the P-8s will be fully operational? Can he also tell us when the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier will be fully equipped with F-35s? Developing future technological advantage is crucial to our defence, particularly at a time when adversaries, including non-state actors, are catching up ever more quickly with technological advances, so I welcome the Government's publication of the combat

air strategy, but can he give us further detail about the discussions he has had with the Treasury on delivery of the strategy? Could he also elaborate on his Department's plans for further investment in research and development?

I have been trying extremely hard not to mention the B-word, but, given the events of the weekend, the Secretary of State will be only too aware of the unique importance of Gibraltar. Can he give us absolute assurances that its status is not under threat?

**Gavin Williamson:** I can give the hon. Lady an absolute and categorical reassurance that Gibraltar is never under threat, ever since the Royal Marines seized it all those centuries ago, and it will always be under the Union flag long into the future, so rest assured that we will always look after Gibraltar.

**Nia Griffith:** I am very pleased to hear those reassurances, as I am sure you are, too, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As this year of commemoration of the past and celebration of the present draws to a close, now is the time to inspire for the future. The RAF and its dedicated personnel have made an immense contribution to Britain's national security thus far, and I have no doubt that they will continue to do so well into the future.

7.15 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): As the shadow Secretary of State pointed out, this is the third defence debate in less than a fortnight. For the defence team, it must be as if all their ships are sailing home at the same time. Anyone would think that the House of Commons had nothing other than defence with which to occupy itself. Let us take advantage of it.

**Gavin Williamson:** It's the most important subject.

**Dr Lewis:** Indeed it is the most important subject.

It is a privilege to follow two such positive and upbeat speeches from two such positive and upbeat Front Benchers. Both our parties are lucky to have them holding the positions they do. The moving intervention from the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) was especially important. It is so important in such debates to humanise the general subject by reminding the House of the real identities of individuals and what they went through in the course of conflict. She should be very proud that her grandfather's award of the Distinguished Flying Medal, won for actions before he lost his life, came through, although sadly only after he had died.

The original thought that crossed my mind was: why hold a debate of this sort in November? But of course it was in November 1917 that the Air Force (Constitution) Act was passed, which led to the establishment of the Royal Air Force on 1 April the following year. I will come back to the circumstances that led to that in a few moments, but first I want to personalise the debate a bit myself. Only last month, I went to Millbrook industrial estate in the neighbouring constituency of the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), where the defence company Leonardo has a major establishment.

Leonardo was renaming one of its buildings, which had been rebuilt, after Flight Lieutenant James Brindley Nicolson, who, as many Members will know, was the only member of Fighter Command to win the Victoria Cross during the second world war. James Nicolson

flew with 249 Squadron and was in one of three Hurricanes ambushed over Southampton. Sadly, he was not the only pilot to be shot down. Hon. Members will be aware that, while his aircraft was ablaze and he was about to bale out, he saw an opportunity to fire on an enemy aircraft. Even though his hands and face were burning, he stayed in the blazing aircraft until he had shot down the enemy. In an act of bathos that bordered on a war crime, he was further injured by being shot while parachuting downwards by an over-enthusiastic member of the Home Guard.

At the ceremony to name the building in Flight Lieutenant Nicolson's honour—sadly, although he survived that encounter, he did not survive the war—I met his nephew, who told me about the other Hurricane pilot who was shot down and whose grave I had seen in my constituency, in All Saints' Church, Fawley, without knowing the story behind it. Martyn Aurel King, it now emerges, was the youngest pilot to fight and fly in the Battle of Britain; he was just 18 years old, and he died on that day in the same incident. After he baled out successfully, his parachute collapsed and he came down on the roof of a house in Shirley, Southampton, and died in the arms of the householder. We still do not know whether the reason that his parachute collapsed was that it was shredded during the attack on his aircraft, or that he too was the victim of whatever foolish and criminal people on the ground thought it fit to fire on descending pilots, whether the enemy or our own people. A terrible tragedy.

I had seen Martyn Aurel King's grave because it is in the second of two rows of such graves in the churchyard. The first row contains the remains of Flight Lieutenant Samuel Marcus Kinkead DSO, DSC and Bar, DFC and Bar, whom I have occasionally mentioned in this House as an outstanding pilot in the first world war, the Russian civil war and the middle east, and ultimately one of the Schneider trophy pilots. He lost his life in 1928 trying to break the world air speed record. He was attempting to become the first man to exceed 5 miles a minute—300 miles an hour—in a forerunner of the Spitfire, an S.5 seaplane.

Through researching and eventually writing a book about Kinkead's life, I came to understand more about the formation of the Royal Air Force in 1917 and 1918. I realised that it had grown out of Parliament's need to react to the increasing terror raids by Gotha bombers on London in particular, which greatly exceeded in terms of casualties the previous and much better known Zeppelin raids. Lieutenant General Jan Christian Smuts had been charged by Prime Minister David Lloyd George to look into the question of the aerial defence of London in particular and to make wider recommendations. A report by Smuts placed before the War Cabinet on 17 August 1917 was later described by the official historian of air power in the first world war as

“the most important paper in the history of the creation of the Royal Air Force”.

What Smuts said was this:

“Nobody that witnessed the attack on London on 7 July could have any doubt on that point... the day may not be far off when aerial operations, with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale, may become the principal operations of war to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate.”

[Dr Julian Lewis]

We have heard about how the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps played their separate parts in the formation of aerial tactics and strategy during the first world war; but what is interesting is the way in which the new Royal Air Force, created in April 1918, by August 1918 was so much more fully integrated with operations on the ground. Of all those events whose centenaries we have been commemorating over the past four years, only one was really positive: the centenary of 8 August 1918, the battle of Amiens, of which hardly anyone had heard—even though German military historians and German generals define that date as “the black day of the German Army”

and British historians regard it as the start of the 100 days campaign that led to the collapse of German resistance and the Armistice in November.

What was significant was that the RAF operated in such close support of the troops on the ground that, for the first time, with the combination of armour, the vital element of surprise, and the extremely effective use of ground forces in complete and total co-ordination with air forces, the breakthroughs that had so long eluded the allied armed forces—leading to such catastrophic casualties at the Somme, Passchendaele and other, equally infamous, battles—turned into a successful and decisive result for the allied cause.

After the end of the first world war, the new air arm flexed its muscles. In my research into the life of Kinkead, I learned about the way in which it was used to try to exercise air control—to some extent by itself, but more effectively, once again, in combination with ground forces—in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1920s. In the 1930s, we see a very different view of air power: a belief that air power, coupled with the use of poison gas in particular and high explosive, would lead to the collapse of civilisation. That was what people then anticipated. Air power in the 1930s was very much regarded in the way that we regard nuclear war in the post-second world war era. As it happens, air power was not as powerful as was predicted, and gas was of course not used from the air in the second world war. Why? Because Winston Churchill had made it abundantly clear that any use of gas, either against our own forces, or even against the forces of our ally Russia, would be met by overwhelming response in kind from the Royal Air Force. That was an early example of deterrence preventing a dreadful weapon from being used at all. Poison gas was used in concentration camps because there was no deterrence there; the victims could not hit back.

During the war, there were arguments about area bombing and attempts to bring about the collapse that had been predicted in the 1930s, but it did not work. History has not been kind to the architects of aerial bombardment where whole populations were targeted for strategic reasons. Precision bombing proved to be far more effective and to a considerable extent far less costly. I think it was the historian A.J.P Taylor who described the loss of life in RAF Bomber Command during the second world war—more than 55,000 Bomber Command personnel died on operations—as “an aerial Passchendaele”. That, I feel, is no exaggeration.

When the war was over, the RAF was involved much more selectively in counter-insurgency campaigns in places such as Malaya, where, I cannot resist pointing out, my partner’s father, Frank Souness, won the

Distinguished Flying Cross during those operations. He is 88 now and we are very proud of him. The purpose of what the RAF was doing was to try to help those countries that had been British colonies and were ceasing to be British colonies to establish themselves independently without falling victim to communist insurgencies. That was a very different role from what the RAF had been doing during the war, although it bore some resemblance to what it had been doing in between the wars.

Let me move on to the dawn of the British nuclear deterrent. It was the V-bombers, Victors, Vulcans and Valiants, that were responsible for carrying the nuclear bombs that constituted the strategic deterrent. Once again, we see the huge range and versatility of the different tasks that the RAF was called on to perform. We have heard from those on the Front Benches about the precision airstrikes that are being used in Iraq and Syria against Daesh. I supported the use of precision airstrikes against Daesh in Iraq, but I voted against it in Syria; not because I disapproved of it, but because it failed to acknowledge the fact that, apart from the Kurdish forces, there were not moderate forces on the ground in whose support that air power could be used. Time and again, we have seen that it is the combination of air power with troops on the ground that proves so vitally effective.

I conclude my remarks by saying, in relation to the RAF, something that the Secretary of State for Defence has heard me say many times in relation to defence generally—usually about warships: quantity has a quality all of its own. There is no doubt about the calibre of our personnel. There is no doubt about the sophistication of our equipment. What there is doubt about is the size and quantity of our armed forces. So I wish him luck in his continuing fight to get the percentage of GDP spent on defence back towards a level commensurate with the levels of threat we face. If he can supply the money, the people of Britain will supply the personnel and the ingenuity to see that the RAF is as effective in the future as it has been for the past 100 years.

7.32 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): I have had to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) in these defence debates many times, and it never, ever gets easier. He is New Forest East’s answer to David Starkey when it comes to these affairs. The House is furnished with much knowledge as the result of his contributions. I pay tribute to him, on behalf of Scottish National party Members, for the sterling job he does as Chair of the Defence Committee. Despite our many disagreements, he is immensely fair to all the voices that make up that Committee.

I welcome the fact that this debate has been brought forward in Government time. Those who attend defence debates regularly will know that they are often requested, particularly by the Opposition. In fairness to quite a few Government Back Benchers, we do have more defence-related debates in Government time. Although this debate appears to be more of a tribute exercise as opposed to a defence debate, I will try to crowbar in some points that I think those on the Treasury Bench would do well to consider.

Before getting into that, however, I want to pay tribute to the Royal Auxiliary Air Force 602 Squadron in Glasgow, which is based in my constituency. It was a

pleasure to spend a Saturday afternoon with its members a few months ago. It had been scheduled in my diary for an hour. It lasted five hours. That is no complaint: it was useful for me and I hope it was useful for them. I would like to pay particular tribute to the commanding officer, Squadron Leader Archie McCallum, who does a fine job at the base in Carmunnock Road representing the base and the RAF to the local community and the city of Glasgow.

Right next door to the Royal Auxiliary Air Force base in my constituency is Cathcart Old parish church, whose minister has done a lot of great work with veterans and members of the armed forces. In particular, there is a real focus on supporting those who served in the RAF. Indeed, I was actually selected as the SNP candidate for my constituency in the RAF café in Cathcart Old parish church, which is very active to this day. As Members would expect, in paying tribute to everyone who has served in the RAF over the past 100 years I want to pay particular tribute to the Scottish effort and contribution to the history and the future of the RAF, much of which we will hear about from others.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to family members who served in the RAF? My grandfather, Hugh Bowman, served in the RAF out of Glasgow. He used to tell me many stories when I was growing up about his time in the RAF, including how they would fill bullet holes with chewing gum.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald**: Yes, is the answer to my hon. Friend's question; I do not think that needs anything further from me.

The Royal Auxiliary Air Force base in Carmunnock Road in my constituency is not our only affinity with aviation, Mr Deputy Speaker. Indeed, if you were to come back to my constituency—you were kind enough to come, I think, around about this time last year—and take part in the Pollokshields heritage trail, you would walk down Fotheringay Road, which is not very far from my house, and come across a Historic Scotland plaque which marks the birthplace of the pioneer aviator James Allan Mollison. He was the first person to fly solo across the north Atlantic in a westerly direction, in August 1932.

I expect someone to jump to their feet when I mention that the connection to air defence at RAF Leuchars goes back to before the creation of the RAF.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald**: My hon. Friend might want me to make my point first. [*Laughter.*] I think the balloon corps was based there from 1915, but I am probably about to get corrected by the MP for RAF Leuchars.

**Stephen Gethins**: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I actually will correct him. It has been based there since 1911, so there is over a century's association between Leuchars and our air services, if I can call it that. If I could further explain, Leuchars, although a military base—we are looking forward to the investment from the Ministry of Defence over the coming years—is a jewel in the crown for the MOD, given that it retains

that fantastic runway and so has the ability to continue to serve the RAF and the rest of the military to this present day.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know he has a very good relationship with the base there: it is a solid part of the local community in his constituency. I am sure there are many great jokes to be made in future SNP adoption meetings about his being the MP for the balloon corps. I would not be so unkind as to illustrate them on the Floor of the House.

It was of course a tremendous act of foresight by this place—something it does not always get right—to create the Royal Air Force, the only one of the forces created by an Act of Parliament. The RAF went on to play a vital role in securing the security, dignity and freedom of millions not just in this country but across the world. I want to pay particular tribute to the RAF Benevolent Fund, which will be known to many Members, and the excellent work it does to support RAF families and veterans. It was an honour to join it in Edinburgh this year as part of the RAF100 celebrations, with other hon. Members.

To turn to more contemporary matters concerning the RAF, it is true that SNP Members have not always agreed with the decisions made by this and previous Governments on how they have chosen to deploy military force, but for the purpose of this debate, we can sit that to one side. However, we need a serious discussion and all wish to see serious progress on morale among those serving in the forces. The last continuous attitude survey showed that only 41% of those serving in the RAF were satisfied with service life and only 32% reported having high morale. The armed forces charity, SSAFA, found in 2016 that 40% of working-age veterans said that they were suffering from depression, 36% felt that they had a lack of hope or purpose, and 30% said that they had a mental health issue.

Somewhere around the beginning of the debate, it was mentioned that the Government brought forward a debate on the new veterans strategy. It is a good strategy and I sincerely hope that it delivers, but there has to be an acknowledgement of the lack of joined-up working and joined-up thinking on how we can tackle these issues. At Defence questions this afternoon, we heard about the work that is done, for example, by armed forces champions in different local authorities. I am not entirely sure what the make-up is in the rest of the UK, but in Scotland we have 32 armed forces and veterans champions in 32 different local authorities, and in some cases, we can have 32 different people doing 32 different jobs, because the role is not clearly defined. It seems that it is really what the champion chooses to make of it, and I think that those who have served in the RAF and the other forces deserve a bit more than that.

We have to consider these issues when we look at the larger issue of the recruitment crisis. I do not have the exact figures in front of me concerning the RAF, but I know that the House has shown great concern about this in the past.

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is raising an important point about morale. Alongside the difficulties that he raises, does he agree that many people in the air force have very transferrable skills that are worth a huge amount of money in the private sector,

[Toby Perkins]

and that as they get towards the mid-levels of their careers in the air force, the pressure on family life and the alternatives that are available mean that they move on and we end up with a deskilled air force? We still have top-quality people and top-quality equipment, but we are perhaps not as match-fit as we should be in the current climate.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct to raise that point. Indeed, the continuous attitude survey even found examples of large numbers of people in not just the air force but the other forces joining up for the purpose of getting a skill to then move out into the private sector. This cannot be a taboo subject that we dance around in such debates; we need to have a serious discussion about this and tackle it head on.

Let me turn to how we make the armed forces a more attractive career and a place that does not have such a movable workforce, with people going in to get a skill to then go into the private sector, as the hon. Gentleman said. The Scottish National party has introduced one proposal in particular that we believe could help to not just resolve some of these issues, but show that there is real political will to make the armed forces an attractive career prospect—it is on the issue of an armed forces representative body. This often causes some Conservative Members in particular to get a bit hot under the collar, but it is an entirely normal practice in several other NATO countries, in many of their armed forces, and it operates in different ways. The model that we suggest as a starting point is based much on that of the Police Federation.

The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood)—the Minister for defence people and the armed forces—said at Defence questions earlier that the reason we do not need to have a body or a trade union, or whatever we want to call it, is that the armed forces have Members of Parliament to do the bidding for them. Look around you, Mr Deputy Speaker—if this is the backstop for members of the armed forces, then my goodness, we are in much more trouble than some of us suspected. If we go back to video footage of the parliamentary debate on the veterans strategy, we see that we could have fit every MP who was here for that debate on to the Treasury Bench alone.

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster)**  
rose—

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I see that the Minister is anxious to come in, and I will let him. We are not proposing in the Armed Forces Representative Body Bill that we give members of the armed forces the right to strike—we do not agree with that—but we do think it is right that members of the armed forces should have a body on a statutory footing to make the case for the best possible terms and conditions as public sector workers who do the most extraordinary job in the public sector.

**Mark Lancaster:** Will the hon. Gentleman share with the House what evidence he has that there is any call from members of the armed forces for such a move?

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** We put this in our manifesto at the last election—we put it in our manifesto for the election before that as well—and we returned 35 of the 59 Scottish seats that were up for grabs. Look, I am not sure to what extent there is polling on this—[*Interruption.*] Well, the Minister asked for evidence, and that is what I have got, but I am quite sure that he and those who sit on the Government Benches behind him want to take this issue seriously. I say this as no criticism of the shadow Front Benchers, but we have brought forward a proposal. Let us get something together so that we can start to have a serious discussion. At the end of the day, we all want the armed forces to be a serious and attractive place to go. My goodness, it has many, many problems, so let us have a discussion. The Scottish National party—indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) introduced this Bill—will aim to produce a Bill, and I will make sure that it gets sent directly to the Minister, as a starting point for where we can take things.

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend is being generous by taking a second intervention from me. I stress to the Minister that a good idea is a good idea that is worth exploring, and I know that he will do this in good terms. I have even spoken to Ministers about families as well, because when we talk about backstops and support, we have to remember military spouses. On that, I recommend Leuchars co-working hub, where some of the military wives—it does tend to be the military wives—have worked together to provide support for businesses. The best back-up that our military and RAF personnel have is their families. They deserve our support, and my hon. Friend's idea is an excellent one, which is supported by a number of families, too.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** My hon. Friend is absolutely correct: a good idea is a good idea. It has been introduced with the genuine best of intentions, and I hope that the Government will see it in that spirit.

The shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), mentioned the issue of funding, which also plays into the whole notion of whether a young person today would choose to sign up to the armed forces. If they were to spend any time at all looking into how the armed forces are funded—the pages of *The Times* newspaper are usually where someone can read all about this—it would cause them some concern. SNP Members have offered to the Secretary of State and his team of Ministers to try to get to a sustainable level of funding for the MOD, because that is clearly not there now. The shadow Secretary of State mentioned the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reports that show that the affordability gap in the equipment plan has got worse, not better—indeed, the best-case scenario has got worse by around £3 billion.

We can really only hold our fingers in our ears about this issue for a certain amount of time. Again, we have brought forward another good idea. Indeed, the former Minister, whose constituency has gone right out of my head, but who chose to resign from the MOD over the Brexit issue, said that he would consider our proposal of multi-year defence agreements to try to bring some sustainability to how the armed forces, such as the RAF, can be funded. Again, this is an entirely normal

practice in other NATO member states and in other European countries. It helps to take the heat out of how defence is funded—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) shouts that the Minister was the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). The proposal could help to take the heat out of some of that discussion and put some proper weight behind what the MOD want to achieve.

In that context of what the MOD wants to achieve, what is the role of the armed forces, and what is the role of the RAF to be? We thought we would all see that in the modernising defence programme, a programme that is now so steeped in controversy that I am not sure whether anyone will be able to take it seriously when it is published. We were supposed to see something earlier this year that would be linked with cyber-security and cyber-defence, but that was hived off in about April, which I think was a sensible decision.

The Government then promised to produce the programme before the summer recess, but instead the House was treated to—I think—four or five paragraphs in a written statement on the day the House rose for the recess. My nephew could have written that in a couple of hours, and he only started high school this year. It is really not on. If I were in the armed forces, looking on, I would be thinking, “What on earth is going on at Government level to ensure that we have the necessary equipment and funds so that we can continue to have the fine armed forces that we deserve?” When will the modernising defence programme be published so that the House can consider it?

I said earlier that creating the Royal Air Force was a tremendous act of foresight by Parliament. I think that we now need to revisit these questions: what is the modern Royal Air Force set to achieve for the United Kingdom and its allies, and what is its role to be in a changing threat picture involving kinetic and hybrid threats? I accept that we cannot give any serious answers in the time that remains this evening—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** There is plenty of time.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I do not want to prevent others from showing their worth, Mr Deputy Speaker.

That is the level to which Parliament needs to take this debate. I think that Parliament is up for it; I just hope that the Government are as well.

7.51 pm

**Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I am also pleased to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), both of whom made knowledgeable, relevant and eloquent speeches.

“Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.”

As I am sure many Members will know, it was Pericles, the 5th-century Greek statesman, who said that. I think the House is united in recognising that for the last 100 years the Royal Air Force has been at the forefront of that defence on our behalf, along with the Royal Navy and the British Army. In that role, they have acquitted themselves with a terrific record of courage, sacrifice, innovation and service.

I am proud to say that much of that innovation, and much of the early development of the Royal Air Force, took place in my constituency. Farnborough had a critical role to play in the genesis of the RAF, partly through its role as the birthplace of British aviation. Samuel Cody, a tremendous pioneer, conducted the first British flight in October 1908. The flight, which lasted not much more than 20 seconds, concluded with his crashing into a tree, but it was nevertheless the first British flight, and was the start of a tremendous sequence of innovation whose legacy still exists today. Everyone will be aware of the terrific biennial air show, when the numerous defence and aviation industries cluster around Farnborough and the Blackwater valley. This year’s show saw the unveiling of *Tempest*, which represents the future of air combat.

Farnborough’s role in the genesis of the RAF was connected not just with the first British flight but with its position as Lord Trenchard’s headquarters, where he formalised the establishment of the Royal Flying Corps as a battle-winning force. What had been a battle-winning force in the first world war had, by the second world war, developed into a war-winning force, in the form of both Fighter Command, which in the summer and autumn of 1940 prevented the invasion of this country by the Germans, and Bomber Command, which smashed Germany’s means of war production with extraordinary losses to its flight crews. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East mentioned that the Bomber Command air crews suffered devastating losses: a total of 55,573 perished during raids. As Members will know, Churchill said:

“The fighters are our salvation but the bombers alone provide the means of victory.”

I think it a fitting testament to their sacrifice that that is inscribed on the Bomber Command memorial in Hyde Park, which most Members will have visited.

**Kevin Foster:** It is absolutely right for my hon. Friend to pay tribute to the crews of Bomber Command, many of whom flew on their own in the dark at night, despite being part of large formations heading for Germany, and who showed exceptional bravery. Does he agree that it is a shame that it took so long to secure that fantastic memorial to those who have lost their lives in the service of this country?

**Leo Docherty:** We waited too long for that memorial, but I think we all agree that, now that it exists, we wholeheartedly support it, and recognise their sacrifice and their valour.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** May I commend to the House Air Chief Marshal Sir “Stuffy” Dowding, who ran Bomber Command, and who was unjustly dealt with at the end of the war?

**Leo Docherty:** I am grateful for that intervention from my hon. and gallant Friend. As he says, the record and the history of Bomber Command created a great deal of controversy, but it is good that we now have the memorial, and a more widespread recognition of its role and its contribution to our efforts in the second world war.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** If I happen to catch the eye of the Chair later, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make this point more fully. During those

[*Christian Matheson*]

difficult early years of the war, it was only Bomber Command that took the war to the fascist enemy that we eventually overcame. I join the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and others in paying tribute to the men of Bomber Command, for whom the recognition that they thoroughly deserved came so late.

**Leo Docherty:** It came late, but it was wholehearted and sincere. I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that Fighter Command was our salvation, but Bomber Command alone was the means for our victory. That, I think, is a fitting testament.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** As I listen to my hon. Friend, I am struck by the fact that the Royal Air Force did what was necessary and right, using the weapons that were available at the time. I hope he agrees that we are blessed indeed that at this time the RAF is equipped with precision weapons that will ensure that we do not face such tactics again.

**Leo Docherty:** Absolutely. Those who fly in the world-leading Typhoon and F-35 platforms are the same in spirit, but they have remarkably more precise weapons. It is to the credit of the early innovators of the RAF that our own military establishment can develop such means of precision.

The war experience of many of those pilots was very poignant, especially because of their youth. Many of them were extremely young, and because of their inexperience they had no real conception of the strategic importance of their role. Many were simply interested in flying. They were not really interested in the politics or the strategy of the war as a whole; they were simply drawn to the near-magical experience of flying.

I am sure that many Members will be aware of the way in which W.B. Yeats gave voice to that sense in his famous poem “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death”, in which he wrote:

“Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,  
A lonely impulse of delight  
Drove to this tumult in the clouds”.

I think that that is an eloquent description of the motivation that many of those young pilots experienced.

Another poetic voice was that of Pilot Officer John Gillespie Magee, who described his experience as a Spitfire pilot with the following famous words:

“with silent, lifting mind I’ve trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
—Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.”

This is all the more poignant because it was written very shortly before his death, aged just 19, in 1941.

We are conscious that it is that same impulse today that drives pilots in our modern Royal Air Force, twinned with a remarkable tradition of courage, sacrifice and service, and we must note that, currently serving in all platforms, such as Typhoon, F-35, even the Chinook regiment in Odiham, Hampshire, we have a very large number of RAF pilots engaged on operations across 22 countries doing their utmost to keep us safe. Since 2014, there have been 1,750 airstrikes across Syria and

Iraq as part of Op Shader, and this is the work of the RAF being conducted to the highest standards of tradition and courage, which we have come to expect. I will give one example: Flight Lieutenant Thomas Hansford, a Typhoon pilot, was last week happily awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for conducting a nine-hour mission to destroy an ISIS convoy out of his base in Cyprus.

So the tradition that we have been describing, and which had its genesis in the first and second world wars, is alive and well, and I think the whole House is conscious that people like Flight Lieutenant Hansford inherit this tradition. He is an extremely brave young man, but we should also note that the 32,000 personnel in the RAF serving alongside him are also loyal and brave, just as he is.

These are people who serve as individuals, but who together in their teams, regiments and formations, and as our Royal Air Force, have a strategic impact and a remarkable reach around the globe. As we celebrate 100 years of the RAF, this House owes them all our gratitude, our respect and our thanks.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. As colleagues will see, a fair few Members want to contribute to the debate. I will not impose a time limit, but if contributors can stick to just under 10 minutes we can get everybody in.

8.2 pm

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), a fellow member of the Defence Committee, and the Chair of the Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis).

I speak as chair of the all-party group on the Royal Air Force, an alumnus of the armed forces parliamentary scheme with the RAF, chair of the all-party group on reserves and cadets forces, about which we have heard a lot, and, very proudly, co-chair, with former Air Chief Marshal Lord Stirrup, of the Royal Air Forces Association parliamentary branch here in Westminster.

We have heard a lot about this year being the 100th anniversary of the RAF, but we have also been celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first world war. It is coming to an end, but I urge people if they have time to pop down to Porthcawl and see the fantastic display both commemorating the events of the first world war and showing the connections of Porthcawl and south Wales to the RAF.

I have a poster in my office that was put out in the first world war encouraging people to join the new Air Force. It is a wonderful inducement to join, saying, “If you volunteer to join, you will not be forced against your will to join the Army or the Navy.” I can see people thronging to join up on that basis alone.

We heard early on about the RAF being formed on 1 April 1918, with the merging of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. That partnership endures and is still important today, and those of us who are following events on the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier can see how vital that synergy continues to be through to today.

Right at the start, the RAF was a service that embraced new technology and techniques, and it has been that way ever since. The new air service fought all over and in every aspect of the battlefields of the first world war, providing invaluable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability, as well as carrying out what we all know in terms of its bombing missions, and that was vital to the eventual victory.

After the war, innovation moved into civilian life. A department of civil aviation was created within the Air Ministry to regulate aviation in the UK in 1919, the same year that two RAF officers, Captain John Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown, made the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic ocean, a seemingly impossible task.

During the interwar years, the RAF began its long tradition of training apprentices in the skills of aircraft engineering and maintenance, setting them up for great careers both in the service and in the growing aircraft industry, which was vital for the regeneration of the UK economy. During those interwar years, the RAF became a true national institution. With the outbreak of the second world war, the RAF once again stepped up to defend the country; it fought valiantly, defending our skies and our shores from invasion.

I want to talk about two things. The first of them is the way the RAF has always been willing to absorb people from across the world. The RAF's No. 145 Squadron consisted of men from Belgium, Australia, Argentina, Czechoslovakia, Trinidad, Poland, the US, Canada and South Africa. The fantastic Air Transport Auxiliary consisted of 166 women pilots who often flew a plane after getting just 15 minutes to read a manual. They had no navigation capability; they literally had maps on their laps and navigated themselves around the country. But it attracted pilots from Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the US, Poland and the Netherlands, again coming to Britain to fight on our side, but coming to Britain also because of the chance to fly with the RAF.

Since I have been chair of the all-party group, we have taken to having a battle of Britain dinner. I want to tell Members about the first of them, because it was one of the most moving experiences I have had in this House. I asked those pilots and aircrew who were with us if they would each give us just three minutes of their memories. The first man said, "I want to thank the merchant navy. Without the merchant navy and their bravery, we couldn't have flown. So that is my memory: the death of all those men in the merchant navy." Everybody was rocked.

Then the second man stood, and he said, "I want to thank the French civilians. My plane came down and I walked for two days. I did not know where the heck I was, and eventually in desperation, I knocked at a door and a family took me in. They hid me; at risk to their own lives, they fed me, they dealt with my wounds, and then they moved me from family friend to family friend until I actually made it to Portugal. And I got back, and I had the chance to fly again."

The whole history of the RAF is about amazing people. I cannot tell hon. Members how wonderful everyone from the RAF I have ever worked with has been and how willing and open to new ideas and innovation they are.

During the cold war, the RAF played a critical role in keeping us safe. We tend to dismiss the cold war now, but it was the deterrence represented by the RAF that kept us safe. Because people knew the risk of challenging the Royal Air Force, the cold war remained a cold war and never became a hot war. Even today, the RAF remains one of the world's most capable and respected air forces. Its fighter capability and its intelligence gathering are huge.

During its first 100 years, the RAF has shown the spirit and invaluable service that our air force provides to this country, not only in defending our skies but in innovating, adapting and improving and in making use of new technology in combination with the skill and professionalism of its servicemen and women to create a national institution that we are all rightly proud of. That challenge continues and faces us every day.

The Secretary of State talked about Carbonite-2, the satellite capability launched recently by the RAF, along with its range of sensors and ground stations. Carbonite-2 is huge by comparison with some satellites that we see nowadays. It is about the size of a washing machine, but its telescope and high-definition video recording will provide critical information for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance—ISR—purposes. That information will be sent into the cockpits of our fighter jets before we know it.

In 2017, I presented a report to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on "The Space Domain and Allied Defence", in which I said:

"NATO needs a whole-of-alliance approach to protect its interests in space to enhance resilience and deter any threat to its space-based capabilities."

I am very proud that the RAF takes on that challenge.

**Jim Shannon:** It would be remiss of us here in the House not to record our congratulations to the hon. Lady on becoming President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. We are all greatly encouraged by her elevation to that position, and we wish her well.

**Mrs Moon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments.

We have a problem within the NATO alliance, however. At the moment, there are just six postings in NATO, in six different departments, that are designated as space operational positions. That is not good enough. We must all welcome the development of the bi-strategic command space working group, which has recommended the creation of a NATO space operational centre of excellence to offer expertise and experience that will benefit nations across the alliance. We are fortunate here in the UK, because we have a very capable space technology community. Not everyone is so advanced in that field, and we need to spread that expertise.

NATO's joint air power strategy is dependent on national space-based capabilities to support air, maritime, land and cyber domains, and for early warning, ISR, communications, positioning, navigation and timing information. We are at a time when the treaties and regulatory and legal frameworks relating to space will have to change. We have always argued that space should not be weaponised, but the threats that are coming our way indicate that other countries will not abide by the existing rules, and we need to be ready to face those threats.

[Mrs Moon]

The Secretary of State talked about the RAF already being engaged in 15 missions across 22 countries, the majority of which are alliance missions. We all have a responsibility to ensure that they have the money, the personnel, the training and the best technology to ensure that the RAF's edge is maintained and that its ability to command the air environment continues.

One of the most amazing things about being a member of the Defence Committee is that we have the capacity to drill down into areas that other people do not always understand. An example would be the RAF rules of engagement. When I was doing a report on behalf of the Committee on remotely piloted air systems—known as drones to the rest of the world—it was fascinating to see the rigorous nature of the rules of engagement and of the tests that everyone going in to pilot a drone in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world is required to go through before they can go on duty. It was fascinating to see the checks and balances involved, and the requirement to ensure the safety of civilians, which was central to everyone's thinking. I do not think that we speak enough about that. We do not tell our public how high the level of integrity is of the people who serve this country, how that manifests itself day after day and how respected it is around the world.

I want briefly to mention the importance of the defence industry. The combat air sector has contributed 80% of the total defence exports over the past 10 years. It has an annual turnover of £6 billion and supports 18,000 skilled jobs. That vast network is part of the RAF legacy and an offshoot of this national institution.

I cannot finish without speaking about the people of the RAF. The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and I share a great friend. When I became the chair of the RAF all-party parliamentary group, a liaison officer was appointed by the Ministry of Defence to ensure that I understood things and perhaps that I behaved myself—he did not do very well at that—as well as to ensure that I was accurate in the things that I said and did. That man was Wing Commander Philip Lamb. After being a parliamentary liaison officer, he went on to be the station commander at St Mawgan and then to become our defence attaché in Sweden. It was there that he became ill. On the day—in fact, at the very minute—that I was told I was to be the next President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, a text appeared on my phone. I opened it, and it told me that Philip had died. Philip was a man who, like so many in the RAF, served his country with distinction, commitment and integrity. Like so many others, he was a man who let the world know that the RAF still attracted the best people. They are people who really do go through adversity to the stars in protecting this country.

8.19 pm

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): It is an immense and humbling privilege to follow the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), and so many other hon. Members who have made such knowledgeable and insightful speeches. I possess neither the insight nor the first-hand experience to measure up in any way to those speeches, so I stand sincerely and humbly as the Member of Parliament for Stirling simply to pay tribute to the Royal Air Force on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. The RAF was

formed, as has been mentioned, as a result of the amalgamation of a number of entities, including the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps. They came together to create the world's first independent, stand-alone air force.

I have no personal or family connection with the RAF, but I honour all those who do. My emotions towards the RAF were first stirred—I feel confident to talk about this now, having heard the Secretary of State say how much he is looking forward to seeing the film "Hurricane"—by the boyhood experience of going with some friends to the Regal cinema on East High Street in Forfar—it is no longer there—to watch the 1969 epic "Battle of Britain". That film and the heroics therein displayed made a great impact on me: feelings of appreciation for the sacrifice of those who serve our country in uniform were kindled, and feelings of deep patriotism were stirred.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and everything he said about the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) is absolutely true. Does he share my appreciation of the women who worked in the Gloster Aircraft Company during the second world war? They often travelled for many hours to get to work, from places such as the Forest of Dean. They manufactured all the Typhoons made in this country and most of the Hurricanes, but I feel that their contribution to the RAF is sometimes overlooked.

**Stephen Kerr:** I add my sentiments to those expressed by my hon. Friend about all those who contributed to the war effort, men and women, because the heroics of the few will never be forgotten; they saved our country and our freedom in the summer of 1940 and thereafter. Although there are few left of the few, our indebtedness to the air crews and ground crews of the wartime RAF is immense and in no way diminished by the passage of time.

I wish to pause at this point to express my appreciation of the modern-day RAF and particularly of those responsible for the quick reaction alert Typhoon aircraft stationed at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, who stand ready to defend our airspace 24 hours a day, every day of the year. They have been called upon to do so with increasing regularity in recent years, as the Russians become more audacious in their incursions.

It is important not to let such an important anniversary go by without taking the time to reflect on it. The RAF has served the people of these islands with great distinction. It is right that we, as a United Kingdom, should be proud of them. That brings me to two of the great pioneers in the field of aviation, who lived, worked and did great things in Stirling: Captain Frank Barnwell and his brother Harold Barnwell, who were the British equivalent of the Wright brothers. They established the Grampian Engineering and Motor Company works in Causewayhead in Stirling in 1907, at the foot of the Wallace monument, where they achieved the first powered flight in Scotland. It was very similar to the experience described by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty). The brothers were in fact Londoners who became great Scottish pioneers—a fitting symbol of the great Union between Scotland and England.

Harold tragically lost his life while testing an aircraft during the first world war, and Frank served his country for many years, gaining the Air Force Cross in 1918.

Frank's three sons all served in the RAF during the second world war, and tragically all three were killed during the battle of Britain or shortly thereafter. I would like to mention their names for the record. They were: Pilot Officer David Usher Barnwell DFC, RAFVR, of 607 Squadron, who died aged 19 on 14 October 1941; Flight Lieutenant Richard Antony Barnwell, of 102 Squadron, who died aged 24 on 29 October 1940; and Pilot Officer John Sandes Barnwell, of 29 Squadron, who died aged 20 on 19 June 1940.

That capacity for service exemplifies so much about the Royal Air Force, and about how bravely those early aviators took to the skies in defence of their families, their communities and their country. That is the type of service that the Royal Air Force has given us as a nation, and we know that we can rely on its vigilance in the skies above us to protect and defend us.

Stirling has a proud connection with the Royal Air Force. The RAF had its Scottish headquarters in Stirling. In fact, the RAF command for Scotland based itself in the Station hotel for the first five years of its operation.

**Bob Stewart:** It had a good bar, probably.

**Stephen Kerr:** The record does not show which part of the hotel was occupied. The hotel was demolished many years ago and the site is now occupied by a branch of the Clydesdale bank and a McDonald's.

There is a memorial to the establishment of the RAF in the field under Stirling castle, where the planes took off and landed in the early days. In fact, it was noted by RAF officers at the time that Stirling had much to commend itself as an airfield, if only the castle rock was not in the way. Given that the Army was already entrenched in Stirling with its headquarters, it is quite possible that some early rivalries were at play, but thankfully the castle and the rock upon which it sits were never removed—that would have been quite a feat, even for our armed forces.

Stirling maintains its connection with the Royal Air Force to this day. In 2005, 43 Fighter Squadron was given the freedom of Stirling and paraded through the city. The "fighting cocks," as they are commonly known, were the first RAF squadron to be given such an honour by a British city. They were stood down in 2009.

The battle honours on the standard held in the church of the Holy Rude in Stirling are a testament to the sacrifice of 43 Squadron, which served on the western front, 1917-18; Ypres, 1917; the Somme, 1918; Dunkirk and the battle of Britain, 1940; north Africa, 1942-43; and Anzio, France and Germany, 1944.

We should be proud of our history, and in Stirling we are—we honour the Royal Air Force and our connection with it. The RAF must be resourced to continue to serve our United Kingdom well into the future. The term "futureproofed" was used earlier, and it is a good measure against which to judge the investment we make in our air and space defences.

**Richard Graham:** My hon. Friend is kind in giving way. On the future of the RAF, does he agree with me—I speak with some interest, because I was once a cadet pilot in the Oxford University air squadron—that the university air squadrons have an important role to play in training both future RAF pilots and future champions of the RAF?

**Stephen Kerr:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend, and I thank him for his intervention.

I conclude by simply saying that I believe we can count on the Royal Air Force, and on the men and women who serve in the uniform of the Royal Air Force, to continue to serve our nation, and the wider world, both in times of conflict and in providing humanitarian relief throughout the world.

8.30 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I am honoured to speak for a few minutes in tonight's important debate marking the 100-year anniversary of the Royal Air Force. I am humbled to follow such incredible speeches, particularly the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon).

I have a few words to say about my constituency link with the Royal Air Force's history. As we all know, the Royal Air Force is the oldest independent air force in the world, and it has a significant place in British military history.

The Royal Air Force actually celebrated its 100th birthday earlier this year, and it has marked that occasion throughout the year with a series of events, the centrepiece being the centenary service in Westminster Abbey, the parade on the Mall and the flypast over Buckingham Palace. Those events were followed by many people in my constituency of Feltham and Heston, many of whom have their own connection, but the constituency also has a connection with the development and growth of the Air Force.

My constituency has played an important role, with Hanworth air park having been a hub for the Air Ministry. It was also home to Whitehead Aircraft Ltd, which was contracted to make more than 820 Sopwith Pups and 500 Airco DH9 bombers. Some of that history is now being brought to light—we have not really known about it or talked about it for a long time—because of local residents who are keen to bring out that history, some of which has been unearthed by the exploration of what happened during the first world war, the centenary of which is also being marked this year.

I pay tribute to local historians Eddie Menday, Roger Cowing and others from the Feltham history group, and also to Katy Cox and Richard Griffiths who have done an amazing job as Friends of Hanworth Park House and who recently supported a play organised by Terri Creaser and others in my constituency that brought local history, including military history, alive to help connect young people with their sense of local place. The play was taken from school to school, and it reached more than 1,000 primary schoolchildren, along with materials to help them to understand how their local area has developed and to give them a sense of pride in place, as well as a connection with and context for what is around them today.

I also pay tribute to our cadets. Our air cadets, sea cadets and army cadets now play an important part in much of our civic life in the constituency. They play their part admirably and gracefully every Remembrance Sunday, and they help with stewarding at other civic events. They are in uniform, and they are proud of their connection with our armed forces.

This debate and the way we have marked the centenary of the RAF will have made a real impact on those cadets who are coming through today. They have big

[Seema Malhotra]

shoes to fill and a great sense of history and pride, and they are now the future. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State's speech, which focused on the future. That is an important part of what we do as we mark the history—we not only recognise, but encourage and engage people to understand and appreciate the sense of purpose and patriotism that comes with serving our country in such a way.

Let me say a few more words about Hanworth and its contribution. Hanworth Park became known as the London air park in 1917. Aircraft were tested there before being accepted and a flying school was developed there where pilots could be trained. On 8 August 1915, the mothers of sailors, soldiers and servicemen gathered in Hanworth for their very own mothers day, which was a celebration of the mothers of those serving in the war, with prizes, food and a special aircraft display. I understand that that was the start of mothers day as we know it today.

The first air ambulance, named "Florence Nightingale", was christened in Hanworth in 1936 by female aviator Amy Johnson. The pilot Lettice Curtis flew a Mk.1 Hurricane to Hanworth before it was converted into a Sea Hurricane. The park is now largely a public space, containing Hanworth Air Park leisure centre, where I was quite good at squash in my younger days, and a library, which is used by many of my constituents. The park's history should not be forgotten. I am proud that it is still home to a flying club for those who are interested in flying model aircraft and staying connected to our history and to what is an important hobby. So I am proud of the role of the people of Feltham and Heston in the formation and development of the RAF.

Before I conclude, I wish to make a couple of points that I made to the Secretary of State earlier about the resources in place now. He mentioned that there may be some more up-to-date data on the last month or so but, according to the Library briefing, the full-time trained strength of the RAF is currently 30,070, which is a deficit of 6.4% on the target of 31,750 that was set out in the 2015 strategic defence and security review for 2020. In addition, only 41% of RAF personnel described themselves as "satisfied" with service life in general, and only 32% reported having high morale in the most recent armed forces continuous attitudes survey. I know that there will be other data and figures to look at, but it is important to recognise that morale; the pressures of change, which can also have an impact on morale; the retraining that may be needed and the support for that; and the impact that low morale can also have on the families of those who are serving, are important issues. It is important for us to keep them in mind as we both celebrate and recognise the changes that are coming through with new technologies and how we need to prepare better for defence and combat in the future.

On behalf of all my constituents, I am very proud to be able to be here to pay tribute to all the pilots and RAF staff who served to defend the UK. We owe them all the deepest of thanks.

8.39 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I had better declare an interest: I am an honourable companion of the RAF Regiment officers' dinner club. I was brought up in the RAF,

so I have a real soft spot for it and particularly for the RAF Regiment, of which my father was an officer. I am going to talk about the RAF Regiment, because only my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has mentioned the rock apes—which is what they are called colloquially because one shot another on a shooting expedition and said, "I thought it was a rock ape."

The rock apes—the RAF Regiment—were formed on 1 February 1942. They had come from various armoured car squadrons—Nos. 1, 2 and 3, which had beautiful Rolls-Royce armoured vehicles—but fundamentally they were to become the infantry of the RAF. They were there to protect the RAF's assets—the aeroplanes, the personnel and the airfields—and they did that spectacularly well. During the second world war, their numbers grew to 80,000. They operated in all theatres and took part in many battles, perhaps the most famous of which, from their point of view, was Meiktila, where in an area of 900 square metres in the middle of the Burmese jungle, a handful of RAF personnel, with Army personnel and Americans, held off the Japanese for three weeks. Each morning, they had to clear the Japanese from out of their lines. That is a battle honour of which the RAF Regiment is rightly proud.

RAF Regiment personnel were always up front, either directing aircraft for strikes or looking for airfields so that they could keep the momentum going for the ground forces, and that is what they did. Indeed, RAF Regiment personnel were among the first people into Paris and Brussels—nothing to do with the bars, I suspect. They also took over something like 16 airfields in north-west Germany very quickly. Squadron Leader Mark Hobden of the RAF Regiment captured Grand Admiral Doenitz, who was going to be Hitler's successor. I knew Mark Hobden—he was my father's commanding officer at one stage—and it was a real honour to meet him.

This is kept too quiet, really, but during the 1950s, the RAF Regiment operated a force called the Aden Protectorate Levies in a country that is now called Yemen. The force was based in Aden, and my father and fellow officers, warrant officers and senior non-commissioned officers of the RAF Regiment operated in the Aden Protectorate Levies. The force saw huge active service—so much so that at one stage the RAF Regiment was the most decorated regiment in the British service.

Let me give an example. On 15 June 1955, some 100 Aden Protectorate Levies personnel mounted in three Land Rovers and nine trucks moved into a wadi south of Fort Robat. Despite a little bit of sniping, the convoy got through to the fort, delivered its supplies to the people there and turned to come back. The personnel started back at 1.30 pm, by which time the local terrorist commander Salem Ali Mawer—a Houthi, by the way—was ready for them. Within a few minutes, the force of 100 people was heavily engaged from the sheer slopes of the wadi. Almost immediately, a young British RAF Regiment officer was killed, and so was an Arab soldier. Several others were wounded.

The commanding officer, Wing Commander Rodney Marshall, ordered my father, a squadron leader, to evacuate the wounded. My father did that. He took them down in a truck, all the way down the wadi—about 2 miles—but then some retreating soldiers, coming out of the wadi, said, "There are no officers left. The commanding officer is dead." My father knew that he

had to go back into the ambush to get everyone out. Meanwhile, in Aden, signals were coming back and I, as a little boy, with my mother, was told by the padre that my father was dead. The story was that all the officers had gone. What happened was this: the senior Arab officer and the commanding officer were killed. In total, eight people were killed, and another eight were wounded. My father received the Military Cross, as did, posthumously, Rodney Marshall, and the senior Arab officer.

I will just read a little bit from the citation in the *London Gazette* about my father after he learned that the commanding officer had been killed.

“Squadron Leader Stewart assumed command of the Force and immediately organised the volunteer party. He led them back into the area which was under heavy and accurate fire, in an attempt to recover the dead bodies and wounded. Unable to locate the dead body of the Wing Commander, he recovered a three ton vehicle which contained a dead guard and had one tyre deflated by rifle fire. He personally drove the damaged truck back under fire, twice stopping to pick up wounded. More casualties were inflicted during the return passage through the Wadi. In all there were eight killed and seven wounded. Having assumed command of the Force he moved it tactically to an emergency airstrip and organised the evacuation of the most seriously wounded. Sniping ensued during this evacuation and hostile and accurate fire was encountered.”

That is typical of the RAF Regiment. It is a superb, outstandingly professional force and a joy to be with. I often, every year, have dinner with them in the RAF Club.

**Richard Graham:** My hon. and gallant Friend has made a remarkable tribute to his father in the RAF Regiment. Will he allow me just to mention my step grandfather who fought in the first war with the Royal Flying Corps and was then seconded to the fledgling Estonian air force to be its chief flying instructor for some years? When he died in the 1980s, he said to me that his only regret was that three countries that he knew well—all three of the Baltic States—no longer existed. Times have changed, fortunately.

**Bob Stewart:** It is a lovely time to remember our families and to attune that with the history of the RAF.

Let me bring the House up to date. In Iraq, five RAF Regiment personnel were killed. Actually, I was present when three of them were killed because I was doing a film. I was cowering in a bathroom when the rockets came in and three RAF Regiment personnel were killed. Therefore, five were killed in Iraq and five more were killed in Afghanistan. These people are right on the frontline, and the RAF realises that. Three Military Crosses were awarded in Afghanistan and Iraq, which is pretty good for such a small number of squadrons.

I hope that I have highlighted, in the short time I have spoken, what a wonderful force the RAF Regiment is, how vital it is to this country, particularly to the Royal Air Force, and how it has a huge part in the future of the Royal Air Force.

I will finish by congratulating the RAF Regiment. The RAF may be 100, but the RAF Regiment, such a crucial part of the RAF, is 76, so well done the RAF Regiment.

8.49 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. and gallant Member for

Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I congratulate him on his excellent tribute to his father and the RAF Regiment; I would say 76 not out—still going.

We find ourselves celebrating 100 years of the RAF, and the men and women who have served to defend this country and our freedom. As we have heard today, the RAF also brings aid and assistance to those in urgent need all around the globe, and takes what is best about this country out to people who are suffering.

I remind the House of the RAF100 celebrations, when a specially designed baton was taken to 100 places associated with the RAF around the UK and overseas for 100 days. That included celebrations in my constituency of East Lothian. East Lothian plays a vital part in the history of the RAF, so it is appropriate that I stand today to remember those from East Lothian who served with the RAF since its founding years. I sincerely hope that there are Members in this House who are aware of East Fortune airfield in East Lothian. The airfield was used from 1918 to 1920, and then again in world war two from 1940 to 1947, when it operated first as a flying training establishment and eventually became the station for a group of de Havilland Mosquito aircraft.

There were also airfields at Macmerry and Drem, which were vital to the RAF during world war two. This is particularly true of RAF Drem, which was the most active fighter station during the war. It was the defence fighter unit for the city of Edinburgh and the shipping area around the Forth, providing first line cover for the city, the Forth bridge and the very important naval base at Rosyth. These three stations brought many RAF personnel to East Lothian and many stayed after the conflicts to bring up their families and become part of the community, so the RAF is closely intertwined with our local history.

East Fortune is now part of the National Museum of Scotland and is one of the best preserved wartime airfields from the first world war across the world. The museum has plans for a sympathetic extension next year to better tell the story of flight in Scotland and around the world, and—more importantly—to tell the history of the RAF. I give credit to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) for reminding me of the Vulcan bomber, because the Vulcan bomber that took part in the Falklands conflict and spent some of its time sitting in Brazil is now resident at the airfield, and can be visited and touched by young children.

That brings me to one of the really important things about the RAF. As has been said today, it is one of the largest employers of apprentices, but the RAF and those aeroplanes also spell an imagination and a charge to children who see them, and give them a drive for future learning. We have spent this Year of Engineering seeking to inspire both boys and girls to a future in technology and mechanics, and the RAF does that day in, day out with fly-bys, visits and more.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that technology can be seen today in the helicopter fleets, particularly in the way in which the Puma has been used in the Caribbean to tackle the problems that arose from the hurricane? That technology is inspiring apprentices all the way through.

**Martin Whitfield:** Indeed, the multifaceted skills and techniques in the machinery and in the individuals who make up the RAF do inspire and save. To use an old

[*Martin Whitfield*]

phrase, the RAF is one of the greatest ambassadors that this country has at times like that of the recent hurricane.

Time is quite tight, so I will use my small conclusion to make mention of one local group, the Aviation Preservation Society of Scotland, which personifies all the elements of the RAF that are so important. Over 17 years, the volunteers of the APSS have undertaken to build a replica Sopwith 1½ Strutter biplane. They have used original plans and materials, investing thousands of hours' work to recreate a flying replica of this world war one plane. The volunteers, many of whom come from the RAF and the aviation industry in and around Edinburgh, have worked without grumble—but with plenty of tea and a lot of huddling around heaters in freezing cold warehouses—to bring this aeroplane to life. In doing so, they have done something much more: they have forged a friendship and a bond. They have given each other support that has generally been good. Their interconnection with each other shows what the RAF does when men and women are serving with it: they act as a family.

The Secretary of State and other right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned the duty that we owe these people with regard to their wellbeing and health. It is imperative that we remember this, because while they serve with the RAF, in whatever job, from the very smallest of opening the doors for someone, all the way through to those at the top—everyone puts pilots at the top, but I think there are others with equal right to claim superiority—they find they have the support they need. It is important that as they move out of the RAF and into other industries, we find a way to offer that support into the future.

**Richard Graham:** I am very impressed by what the hon. Gentleman said about his volunteers on the Sopwith Camel in East Lothian. This would be a good moment also to remember the amazing volunteers at the Jet Age Museum just outside Gloucester, who have recreated a number of aircraft and are working on a Typhoon at the moment. If he ever has a chance to visit, I would be very happy to take him round.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am very grateful for the invite. I will now leap back before I feel my phone ringing to say that it was of course a 1½ Strutter, not a Camel, in this case.

The work on the aeroplane was completed in time for this year's Armistice Day, so 100 years after the end of world war one, these men—and some women—pushed out a replica aircraft from world war one. It truly was a fitting tribute to those remembrances. The plane is dedicated to First Lieutenant Richard Bell Davies VC, who came to prominence after the untimely death of Squadron Commander E.H. Dunning in his attempt to land a Sopwith Pup on the foredeck of HMS Furious for the third time. That fatal accident led to the building of the first flat top across a length of ship. People came across the problem that the funnels on the ships still needed to expel the poison gases, and so they built the island design that is still used on aircraft carriers today. Bell Davies was the first pilot to successfully take off and land again a 1½ Strutter on the deck of an aircraft carrier.

This shows that it is individuals who make up the RAF. Their dedication, perseverance, bravery and humour reflect all that is good about the RAF. The dedication of those in this country in honouring the RAF with acts from simple remembrance once a year, to dedicating time to building a replica of a plane that technologically led the world when it first flew, is testament not only to the role of the RAF but to how dearly this country holds the RAF in its heart.

8.57 pm

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. It is particularly welcome to have this debate today because someone with very strong links to my constituency celebrated his 97th birthday yesterday—Johnny Johnson, the last surviving British Dambuster. Many will know him for his bravery, along with that of his 617 Squadron comrades, in 1943. After the war, he lived in Torbay for many years. He became a councillor for a period of time. He was also the chairman of Torbay Conservative Association at the time of the Maastricht votes, so he had a very interesting time and had some wonderful tales he could still tell many years later, particularly when he did a TV interview about why the then Member for Torbay had not attended one rather crucial vote. I must tell my chairman that he need have no worries about me this time.

The RAF had a very big impact on Torbay, particularly during the war. Many of our hotels were requisitioned to become RAF hospitals, including the Palace hotel, where I had my wedding reception. That hotel operated as an RAF hospital until it was bombed in 1942, with a number of service people being killed in the raid. Many people developed an abiding link with Torquay—and with Torbay, in particular, due to the time they had spent there recovering from their injuries of war.

That link with the RAF continues today. We have the Royal Air Forces Association club in the heart of Torquay, with Steve Colhoun as branch chairman and Linda Tombs as branch secretary. It is extremely active in supporting the veterans community and acting as a champion for the RAF by encouraging people to think about it as a career. We have a thriving air cadet corps. The 200 Torquay Squadron of the Air Training Corps is a vibrant branch. We see it at every Armistice event, and it is out there making a real difference in the local community. The air cadets are not just a recruiting arm of the RAF; they teach the RAF's ethos to so many young people, to give them success in whatever career they choose—although we particularly welcome it when people decide that they want to carry on wearing light blue for a much longer period. I pay particular tribute to the squadron's commanding officer, Michael Gormley.

It was great to see the RAF in action when I spent a year in the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I saw a whole range of things, from Fylingdales, where RAF personnel are on permanent watch as part of the ballistic missile warning system, to Akrotiri, whose RAF forces have been critical in hitting Daesh. The 84 Squadron, a helicopter squadron, is also based at Akrotiri.

We all know about the divide of Cyprus and the very difficult situation there, which we hope one day will be resolved by peace talks and negotiations. I saw something quite telling there about the role the RAF plays. In the squadron's mess room, there were two letters on the noticeboard: one from the Greek Cypriot authorities,

thanking the squadron for its help during recent wildfires, and one from the Turkish Cypriot authorities, to which it had also provided assistance. That highlighted the way the RAF provides not only a force against our country's enemies but a visible sign of Britain supporting and assisting. Of course, a constant watch is also kept over our skies by the quick reaction alert crews.

It is encouraging to look towards the future, in particular to the F-35, but also to Tempest. People might wonder why on earth we are talking about an aircraft that probably will not see operational service until I am not far off the age when I get my bus pass, but there are long lead-in times.

I hope we will continue to work with our traditional allies, particularly given the rising threat in Russia. That not only makes sense in terms of spreading costs, but it makes eminent sense that we have similar planes and aircraft, so that if we ever need to operate completely interdependently, we can literally operate on the same platforms. The RAF will be managing not only the challenge of working across the world, but the challenge of working with the Royal Navy, as it looks to operate off the Queen Elizabeth class carriers.

It is great to have this opportunity to reflect on the last 100 years of the RAF, even if it is a relatively brief chance to do so. This force not only served our nation with great distinction in 1940 but continues to do so today. A whole new generation of children and young people from Torbay will hopefully look towards it as part of their future—a future that will not depend on someone's gender, now that the services have completely opened up all roles to men and women. It has been a pleasure to talk about the phenomenal contribution of the RAF in the past, the present and the future.

9.3 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), as I do on a regular basis; I am always glad to hear his careful comments. It is an honour to speak on this momentous occasion, and it is great to follow such incredible and emotive speeches from right hon. and hon. and gallant Members, who, with their knowledge, make a fantastic contribution to these debates.

I take this opportunity, as others have, to begin by thanking every serving, retired and former member of the RAF. We thank you for your service and sacrifice. The sacrifice was great when the RAF was formed. We all know Winston Churchill's wonderful grasp of the English language, which is much better than mine will ever be; I often quote him in this House because of his grasp of the English language. He noted in this hallowed Chamber that

“the ‘Battle of France’ is over. I expect that the battle of Britain is about to begin.”—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1940; Vol. 362, c. 60.]

This was fought and won by a fledgling Air Force. We always admire his inspirational words:

“Never...was so much owed by so many to so few.”—[*Official Report*, 20 August 1940; Vol. 364, c. 1167.]

In those few words, he wonderfully summed up exactly what the battle of Britain was about, with young men giving their lives with regularity at that time.

As I said earlier to the Secretary of State about the RAF cadets, we have very active RAF cadets in Northern Ireland, particularly in Newtownards in my constituency.

It is good to know that what they do there may be the beginnings of a career in the RAF, and many have walked out of Regent House and gone on to serve in the RAF. We are also very aware that many have joined the Army and many have joined the Navy as well, so the cadets are very active in my constituency.

May I thank those involved in the armed forces parliamentary scheme? The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) is the chair of that group, Johnny Longbottom helps to keep the wheels turning, and we had Vasco from the RAF. When I look across the House, I see Members who have done that course, including the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) and others on the far side of the Chamber. I believe that every one of us learned so much from that RAF part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which was an absolute pleasure to be on. They brought it alive.

We were very privileged to have the opportunity to go to Akrotiri in Cyprus, but also to Gibraltar and on Operation Biloxi in Romania. The Secretary of State referred to Romania in his introduction. Having visited Operation Biloxi, it was incredible to see the relationship that the RAF has with the Romanian air force. When we saw those from the Romanian air force, its aeroplanes, let us be honest, were not of the most modern standard, but their energy, interest and commitment were incredible and equal to those from the RAF who were there as well. I just want to put on the record our thanks to them.

It is very nice to see the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Armed Forces in their places. If ever there was a tag team that works well, there it is. We are very pleased to see them both in their places and doing well. I say the same to the shadow Ministers, who have a deep interest in this subject matter, and we look forward to their contributions.

As a small boy, along with the many other things a young boy wants to do, I remember always wanting to be the driver of a train, to join the Royal Marines or to be in the Air Force. All those things go through your mind when you are under the age of 10, but then you suddenly find that you wear glasses, your eyesight is not too good and you know that your chances of joining the RAF are gone.

**Bob Stewart:** Did the hon. Gentleman ever have the delight of meeting Colonel Paddy Mayne, DSO three bars, who was from Newtownards?

**Jim Shannon:** No, I did not. I think he had just passed away at the time I was brought into this world.

**Bob Stewart:** I thought you were older than that.

**Jim Shannon:** No, no. I am not older than that. I am not quite sure how to respond to that, but I do know Paddy Mayne's history—I know it well. We have a statue of him in the square in Newtownards. I was on the council at that time, and I was able to be involved in that particular project. He is a son of Newtownards, and a terribly courageous person. His books are “Boys Own” books. If Members have not read the Blair Mayne story, I can tell them that he was the only man—not the only man, because there were probably others—who did not receive a VC. I would say that he should have had a VC, but we know that he unfortunately had a bit of a problem with authority sometimes, and with that

[Jim Shannon]

came objections from those at a higher level. If we continue with our confidence and supply arrangement—we will see how that goes—it may yet happen. I have asked my guys to look into that posthumous VC for Blair Mayne. It is something I would be pleased to see.

Why was I interested in the RAF as a small child? It was because there was an RAF squadron base only a few miles from where I lived, RAF Ballyhalbert, and obviously there was the one at Newtownards as well. Today, only the runway lighting and the control tower remain at Ballyhalbert. The stories and the legends were well known and fed many a young man's dreams of service for Queen and country and the open skies. I did not serve in the RAF, but I was pleased to serve in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Artillery for 14 and a half years. The RAF has a squadron at Newtownards airport, as well, and there is a strong history of service in the RAF, the Army and the Royal Navy in my constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) was here earlier, and there is a base at Aldergrove in his constituency. The Secretary of State referred earlier to 28 bases across Northern Ireland, but I think we should round it up to 30. That is probably about right. It is something we are all very proud of. We are also very proud of Shorts, as it was known before it became Shorts Bombardier, which built the planes in Newtownards. On the plane over today I read in the *Belfast Telegraph* about Joe Hendron, the SDLP MP for West Belfast, who told the story of when he was a young boy during the bombings in Belfast and how when he was about to leave the bombs were falling. It is a coincidence that his story was in the paper today.

Ballyhalbert opened provisionally in May 1941 as an RAF Fighter Command base and officially on 28 June of the same year. The primary weapon was the Supermarine Spitfire. A few weeks ago, we had a ceremony in Newtownards, but I will come to that in a second. Suffice it to say that everyone is captivated by Spitfires. The base provided local protection from Luftwaffe raids on Belfast and the rest of the Province. I understand that Belfast was the seventh-most bombed city in the whole of the UK. Other aircraft operated from the base: the Hawker Hurricane, the Bristol Beaufighter, the North American P-51 Mustang and the Boulton Paul Defiant night fighter. Many fighter planes were active there.

During its lifetime, Ballyhalbert was home to personnel of the RAF, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, the British Army, the Royal Navy and the United States Army Air Forces, and servicemen from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Poland also saw duty there and at Newtownards. By the summer of 1941, RAF fighter group No. 82 had become operational, with exclusive responsibility for the defence of Northern Ireland, and its group headquarters was at Stormont. The bunker at Kircubbin, just down from where I live in the Ards peninsula, was the operations room for the Belfast sector, but there is speculation that it was designed to accommodate last ditch defence requirements in the event that Great Britain had been invaded and Westminster had ceased to be the seat of government—that did not happen, thank goodness.

In October 1942, No. 82 group was abolished and the then Senate Chamber at Stormont, now the Northern Ireland Assembly, became the location of the headquarters of the RAF in Northern Ireland. All operational personnel, including those who had been at Kircubbin from the outset, were transferred to Stormont and the sector operations rooms at Kircubbin closed. The Stormont facility was operational until the end of the war.

If right hon. and hon. Members get the opportunity to go to the Northern Ireland Assembly and enjoy one of the tours, they will get the history of Stormont. At the time of the second world war, it was a very big white building, so it was covered in tar, cow manure and grass to make it blend in. With the main driveway up to Stormont and the two arrows—two roads—coming off it, it looked like a bombing run for the Luftwaffe, so it was important to camouflage it. After the war, German prisoners were given the task of removing the tar, cow manure and grass. I am not sure which was longer, their time in prison or the time it took them to take all that there off, but I know one thing: it is a marvellous history for the people there.

The Senate Chamber, too, had an important part to play in the story of the RAF. It was used as a war room, and anyone who has the opportunity to tour beautiful historic Stormont should take it, as footage of the Chamber being used as a war room will be there. Northern Ireland also had a significant role during the second world war in that it was Catalinas and Sunderlands flying out of Fermanagh that spotted the Bismarck on the west coast of Ireland. The cat-and-mouse operation in the Atlantic to catch the Bismarck went on for some time, and we played a small role in that.

The week before last, at our cenotaph and memorial garden in the main town of Newtownards, my local borough council unveiled a memorial to the Polish pilots. We have had strong contact with Polish pilots, to whom the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) referred, and we are particularly proud of that. They were stationed at Ballyhalbert and Newtownards. The unveiling was attended by Air Vice Marshal David Niven, who retired just last week. He spoke eloquently about the necessary involvement of Polish expertise and experience, saying that the battle of Britain might have ended differently had it not been for the close co-operation of the Polish men, who left all they knew and gave their all to halt Nazi Germany during the second world war. Some of the pilots who came to Ballyhalbert and Newtownards flew their planes from Poland to the UK and some made their way by other means.

The Polish pilots played a significant role in my constituency, and we recognised that through that memorial. Some of them settled with their families in the Ards peninsula, such as the Denkoskis and the father of my constituent Vanda Henderson. We have a lot of thanks to give to those Polish men and women, and the memorial at Ards is a token of recognition of their great sacrifice.

We owe a great debt to our incredible RAF, which in the second world war and every conflict since has shone as a beacon and inspired new generations, including the RAF Air Cadets at Regent House School, to wish to serve their Queen and country in the open skies. Our freedom always comes at a great cost, and we are eternally thankful for the formation of the Royal Air Force, and eternally grateful to every person who wore its uniform and those who wear it today.

9.17 pm

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** It is always an honour to speak in this House. It is humbling, too, especially on a day such as this, when we have heard so many extraordinary speeches from hon. Members and hon. and gallant Members in all parts of the House. I am grateful to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who quoted Winston Churchill. I have the honour to live in the village in which Churchill is buried. Churchill famously spoke of “the few”, and we tend to think of the few in 1940 as fighter pilots, but of course Churchill was at pains to point out that he was also referring to bomber crew. That is where I first became interested in the Royal Air Force.

When I was young, I became aware that my grandfather had done something remarkable during the war. He, typical of that golden generation, vehemently denied that he had done anything remarkable at all, but he was a navigator on Wellington bombers in 1940 and 1941. While the few in the fighter squadrons were defending this country above our heads, he was taking his Wellington bomber to bomb invasion barges on the Channel coasts, and he later took his bomber to the first raid on Berlin—a raid that caused little military damage, but did cause Hitler to switch Luftwaffe attacks from Fighter Command’s air bases to London, which gave Fighter Command the space it needed to get back to full strength.

Lest we think of the Bomber Command of later years of the war, with 1,000 bomber raids and bomber streams, let me remind the House that in the early days of the war, when my grandfather was going off in his Wellington, the bombers went off alone, as single aircraft, albeit in a squadron, which was strung out over many miles, so that in the event of attack from night fighters or ack-ack, they were alone. We should all think about the particular kind of psychological courage it took to take the battle to rampant evil in the freezing skies over occupied Europe.

Later in the war, my grandfather was reinforced by his brother, my great uncle, who flew as a bombardier in Lancasters in No. 5 Group, which was involved in special operations—U-boat pens and the like. They were known as the bomber brothers. Their influence was strong in the early years of my life, as I became aware of what they had achieved. Superlatives are thrown around quite easily in this place, but there is a reason why we come back to 1940. The Royal Air Force has achieved extraordinary things during the past 100 years, but it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of what it achieved in the second world war. It really did, along with many others, save the world at the moment of its greatest threat, particularly in 1940, and keep democracy alive for us all.

Having had that family interest, I now have the enormous honour of representing Royal Air Force Brize Norton in my constituency. No speech I make about the Air Force in this House would be complete if I did not mention RAF Brize Norton. It is commanded by new station commander Dan James. It is quite simply the pride and joy of west Oxfordshire. It is the very best of our country and our county. Everything that the RAF does is made possible by RAF Brize Norton. Nothing would happen without it, but luckily it makes everything happen. In Operation Ruman, for example, the A400Ms took part in vital humanitarian work. That was only possible because RAF Brize Norton was able to respond highly efficiently at late notice and with high speed.

The Typhoons taking off from RAF Lossiemouth or RAF Coningsby to tackle the Russians as they probe our air defences are refuelled by Voyagers from 10 Squadron or 101 Squadron at RAF Brize Norton. The Secretary of State, in his opening speech, kindly referred to global reach. The only global reach in Europe is provided by the C-17s from 99 Squadron at RAF Brize Norton. NATO air policing in eastern Europe is resupplied by the Hercules, the C-17s or the A400Ms from RAF Brize Norton. The aircraft taking the battle to Daesh are also supplied by those same transport aircraft and are refuelled and tanked en route by the Voyagers from RAF Brize Norton.

I apologise to the House—actually, on one level I do not apologise—for making quite clear exactly what the Royal Air Force does and what RAF Brize Norton does to facilitate everything it does.

**Bob Stewart:** I think that I am right in saying that my hon. Friend has omitted one element of RAF Brize Norton: the parachute jump instructors of the RAF are there, too. I seem to recall that I had to jump out of an aeroplane from Brize Norton 50 years ago.

**Robert Courts:** My hon. Friend is correct. I gave way to him out of deference, but I was about to mention the military training that takes place at RAF Brize Norton. We always think of the RAF Falcons, the wonderful display team, but everybody who learns to parachute jump in the British military will do so at the parachute training school in Brize Norton. The Airborne Delivery Wing supplies all the aerial drops. I thought my hon. Friend was going to admonish me for not having mentioned the Royal Air Force Regiment. We have 2 Squadron, which has just come in recently. It is also assisted by some of the auxiliary services as well.

I will not trouble the House for much longer, as I know other Members wish to speak, but there are two or three other things I would like to mention very quickly. First, I have talked a lot about units and aircraft, but let us not forget that it is the people who make the Royal Air Force work. That was as true in the past as it is today. We have a number of excellent auxiliary Air Force units at Brize Norton in pretty much every trade that can be imagined: movements, regiment, air crew and aeromedical. These people give up their free time to train, travel and serve at weekends and during their time off. They really make the modern Air Force work, particularly with the whole-force concept.

The second thing is air cadets. We have three excellent units in west Oxfordshire—at Brize Norton, Witney and Chipping Norton—who are enthusing for the future, particularly in introducing the concept of STEM skills, which we have talked about a great deal in the debate.

Lastly, looking to the future, I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for bringing forward the combat air strategy, which I pressed for and which I welcome warmly and wholeheartedly. Perhaps in due course he can give us an update about the progress on that, and I am thinking particularly of national partners. We have talked in the past—this has been trailed in the press—about the possible involvement of Japan, Sweden, obviously the Americans, and others. While I am talking about the combat air strategy, I press him to start thinking about helicopters. If we start thinking about what we need in the future, we need to think about all aircraft types, and of course, I have to think about transport as well as fast jets.

[Robert Courts]

I am grateful for the time that the House has given me. The Royal Air Force has had an incredible 100 years, but those proud years are only to be succeeded by even prouder years.

9.25 pm

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this debate to commemorate 100 years of the RAF. Like many hon. and right hon. Members, I have some RAF history, in that my dad's father served during the second world war in RAF Middleton St George and RAF Croft near Durham. In my constituency, I am lucky to have not one or two, but three RAF bases: RAF Barkston Heath, RAF Cranwell and RAF Digby. Lincolnshire has a very proud military history, and Waddington, Coningsby and Syerston are just over the borders of my constituency.

RAF Barkston Heath provides an elementary training facility. We have heard how the RAF started its life here in the House, but my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) spoke about how it had been drawn from the Navy and the Army. In fact, Barkston Heath is where the Royal Navy and Army air squadrons learn their basic flying training. The Secretary of State talked about the future of the air force. I was pleased to see that the investment in the new aircraft—the Grob Tutor being replaced by the Prefect—is providing modern technologies to ensure that the pilots of tomorrow have the best possible learning experiences.

RAF Cranwell is—I contend to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts)—the most famous RAF base in the country. It, too, started its life as a Navy base—as Royal Navy Air Station Daedalus—on 1 April 1916 before it was turned into RAF Cranwell on 5 February 1920 by Sir Hugh Trenchard when the RAF was formed. The future of RAF Cranwell, like the future of RAF Barkston Heath, is very strong. Currently, RAF Cranwell does officer training, so all the officers become officers at RAF College Cranwell, but in the future, all service personnel of whatever rank will begin their training at RAF Cranwell and receive all their basic training there. There is also fixed-wing flying training, and it has a strong medical link. Recently, a g-force centrifuge has been built—a very high-tech piece of equipment—so that pilots can experience g-force on the ground and practise the skills that they need to help them to retain consciousness while they are under g-force. The RAF Centre of Aviation Medicine will also follow to Cranwell in the future.

Finally, we have RAF Digby, which is one of the oldest RAF bases in the country and is home of the Joint Forces Intelligence Group of Joint Forces Command, which I visited a few weeks ago.

I took part in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray), who champions and organises the scheme, along with Lieutenant Colonel Longbottom, Wing Commander Smith—mentioned as “Vasco” earlier—and Mr Fico. This has been one of the most amazing experiences for me. I came into Parliament with a general public-level knowledge of the RAF, and representing a constituency with such a proud military

history and three RAF bases, it was very important for me to learn as much as I could, as quickly as I could, about the RAF. The AFPS has greatly facilitated that.

I have visited the bases around my constituency, but also others around the country, including Valley, Benson, Brize Norton and Shrivenham, where we learnt about how all the forces work together. I have visited Waddington, Coningsby, Marham—to see the new F-35—and Honington. We also travelled to the Falklands and Cyprus, and visited the air policing mission in Romania. I will not say more about those visits, because I am aware of time and the fact that others wish to speak.

Another visit that we made was to RAF Scampton, to see the Red Arrows. What a fabulous experience that is! Like other residents of Lincolnshire, I am often lucky enough to see them practising their loops, twirls, and other tricks over our home and from the car as we drive around the county. I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that the Red Arrows remain in Lincolnshire even if Scampton is closed. As part of the RAF 100 celebrations, they came to London along with all the other aircraft and made a spectacular display in the sky.

Lincolnshire has had its own way of commemorating the centenary, however, on both a large and a small scale. For instance, the International Bomber Command Centre has opened on Canwick Hill, in my constituency. It overlooks Lincoln Cathedral, which the pilots would have used to help them to fly back home. Its education centre, the Chadwick Centre, is named after Roy Chadwick, the designer of the Lancaster bomber. It has collected more than 1,200 personal experiences, so that in the future people will be able to learn about what happened during the second world war. A memorial spire is encircled by walls carrying the names of the 57,871 who gave their lives as part of Bomber Command, or in support of it. It is a very moving tribute.

There is also the Bomber County Gateway Trust. A project that is currently in progress is the building of a fully sized Lancaster bomber at the side of the A46, so that people who drive into Lincolnshire will be immediately reminded of its RAF heritage. There is a beautiful picture of what it will look like: tilted slightly, with poppies like a carpet falling from it. The trust has raised a considerable amount, but more is needed. If the Secretary of State can spare any money from his budget and would like to contribute, that would be extremely welcome.

Today's debate has given us an opportunity to commemorate the sacrifices and hard work of the servicemen and women who have gone before, to thank the servicemen and women of today and to think about the future. There have been 100 years of the RAF, but, as many other Members have said, the next 100 will be just as good, if not better.

9.33 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): It is a great honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson).

Stafford has been a centre for the RAF for 80 years. It was in 1938-39 that 16 MU, a maintenance unit, moved to the newly constructed RAF Stafford. It remained there for many decades, until the RAF base became a Ministry of Defence base in the mid-2000s. But we still have a strong RAF presence through the tactical supply

wing, which is based at MOD Stafford. That wing goes all over the world to refuel rotary-wing helicopters—whether in the Falklands, Cyprus or Kenya, where I came across it a few years ago in Nanyuki on a training exercise with the armed forces parliamentary scheme.

I pay tribute to the Royal Air Force for all it has done for Stafford over so many years. We are greatly honoured to have large numbers of former and current RAF service personnel in my constituency. There are, of course, some other connections. There are airfields at Hixon and at Seighford, which was a back-up base for Wellington bombers during the war. Those airfields are no longer in use, although Seighford is still used for gliding. Of course, we also have the RAF Museum reserve collection, which I and the Secretary of State for Defence had a wonderful visit to. We saw such things as Douglas Bader's artificial legs and Lawrence of Arabia's record collection from when he served as an aircraftsman in the RAF. I hope that some of the exhibits can be put on public display. They are very well looked after in my constituency, but it would be nice for more people to see them.

I would like to conclude with a personal recollection or reminiscence. My grandfather, Benjamin Lefroy, was a Canadian, born in Vernon, British Columbia. He was in 43 Squadron, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) mentioned, when the RAF was founded 100 years ago. He joined the Army and then the Royal Flying Corps, and then became a Sopwith Camel pilot in 43 Squadron.

On the first day of the battle of Amiens, the RAF, as the RFC had become, was trying to knock out bridges near Peronne. The RAF lost 60 aircraft that day, 8 August 1918—an astonishing rate of loss that shows just how much they were in a ground attack role; they were very exposed to enemy fire—and one of them was my grandfather's. He later wrote—this is in the history of 43 Squadron and I am grateful to my step-uncle, Bob Lefroy, for some of this:

“I had done my work for the day, two sorties, and was reading my mail in the mess. An orderly came haring in and asked for volunteers as a pilot in A had gone sick. As the only person in the mess—it was me! The only machine I could get was ‘R’, the target practice machine, a slow and bad machine. My own Camel was being repaired, having collected some bullets on my previous sortie. Soon after coming out of cloud, we ran into fifteen German fighters. My engine was not good, and trying to get more out of it I ‘choked’ it. At this time, I saw Cecil King with a couple of German aircraft on his tail and so pulled up to give ‘em a squirt and down they came on me. The universal joint was shot off the joystick, my rudder wires cut and petrol was squirting all over the cockpit. With the throttle I kept pulling the nose up until, at 300 feet, I went into a spin and went in. I came to four hours later, in our barrage, with a German at my side. I had three bullet holes in me, both knees out of joint, fractured skull and fractured wrist—and of course was a P.O.W.”

As Germany began to fall apart at the end of the war, he was taken to hospital in Germany so that they could make a better job of repairing his wounds, for which I give great credit, but civil order broke down and an orderly, who believed he was doing the best thing for my grandfather, as he abandoned the hospital cut the traction ropes on his legs, and he was left for three days utterly immobilised and completely unattended. In the end, the British sent trains throughout Germany to collect such people at the end of 1918, many of whom were stuck without any care in hospitals. After the war, my grandfather stayed on as one of the Dominion scholars and then met my grandmother.

I want to finish by going back to Cecil King, whom my grandfather was up in the air with at that time. They were both 19 at the time. Cecil King was an RAF fighter ace—one of the real aces of 43 Squadron—who shot down 22 aircraft. He was awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross as well as the Croix de Guerre from the French. He was killed in a flying accident in January 1919; he was just 19.

As we remember the huge heroism of the men and women of the RAF over the years, we remember those who survived into old age, like my grandfather, who died in his 80s, and those such as Cecil King, who died as a 19-year-old, hugely decorated.

9.38 pm

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to respond to this excellent and on numerous occasions very moving debate, and to join colleagues in acknowledging and celebrating 100 years of the RAF, the world's first independent air force. I am also pleased to echo what the Secretary of State said about Sir Stephen Hillier's leadership of the RAF generally and about his consummate skill in organising the celebrations that have been taking place. For me, the highlight of the last few months was the flypast of aircraft old and new over the House of Commons and, more importantly, over Buckingham Palace. It was wonderful to see the large crowds of people out in the Mall paying their respects to the air force. It was especially pleasing to see large numbers of young people present, and I wish to reinforce the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) about the air cadets, of whom this country should be very proud indeed.

We also heard fine contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and the hon. Members for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon). The Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), made the point that it was important to acknowledge the role that key personalities and individuals have played in the history of the RAF. A number of Members have referred to close relatives, including the hon. Members for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Witney (Robert Courts). The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) referred to his father, a distinguished squadron leader who gave so much for his country.

I, too, should like to refer briefly to my father. David Haydn David was not highly commended or given many medals, but he nevertheless made a huge contribution to the war effort. He was an engineer on Lancaster bombers and served much of the war in the far east. It is important to remember that thousands of people like him—women and men—made vital contributions to our war effort in a whole host of different ways.

I am also pleased to be a member of the RAF section of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. Like other Members here, I pay tribute to the work of Vasco. Those Members who are in the scheme will know exactly who I am talking about. Although I have been in the scheme for only a few weeks, I have learned a great deal about the working of the RAF. I have been extremely impressed by the kit, the stations, the organisation and, above all else, the people I have met and their unstinting commitment to the work of the RAF and the defence of this country.

[Wayne David]

As we have heard, the RAF has a long and proud tradition, but it is also important to look to the future. I am pleased that the Government have produced a combat air strategy, which was published in July this year. This comes at an important time. We will see the first of the new, fifth-generation Lightning F-35 aircraft coming into service in the new year. As we know, they will replace the ageing Tornado GR4 aircraft in March 2019. Those F-35s will partner and complement the Typhoon until 2040. It is important to have a long-term perspective, and that is something that the RAF teaches us.

I am also pleased that the Tempest project has been recognised as a vital part of the forward projection of the RAF. A number of partners have been stated by BAE Systems and the Ministry of Defence, including countries such as Turkey, but we should not forget that, as the project develops, it will become essential to have a close working relationship with the French and the Germans, irrespective of what happens with Brexit. We need to remember that the Typhoon has been a big European success story, of which we have been an essential part, and I hope that that European co-operation will continue to be a central part of the RAF's work. Europe is also important for defence generally. We have heard today about the Galileo project, and although the negotiations with our partners in Europe appear to have been successful, we need to be mindful of how much it would cost for us to go it alone in the future. Co-operation will have to continue with our allies, both in Europe and, critically, in NATO.

It is important to recognise that the RAF has been enormously successful in its recent work in Syria and Iraq, with many successful sorties. I pay tribute, in particular, to the professionalism with which it conducts its work, ensuring that airstrikes are carried out, as far as is humanly possible, with pinpoint accuracy. I am also pleased that, in our own backyard, with the situation in central and eastern Europe, we see the RAF playing a prominent role, alongside our NATO allies, to ensure that any potential Russian threat is thwarted.

It is important to take this opportunity also to express some concerns. One of our concerns is about personnel, which the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) discussed in his speech. There is currently a deficit of 6.4% against the RAF's staff target—full-time trained staff of the RAF currently number 30,070, but the figure set out in the 2015 strategic defence and security review is 31,750. That is a cause of concern. The situation might not be as bad as it is in the Army and the Navy, but the number is significantly below what it should be. It is also concerning that, according to the most recent armed forces continuous attitude survey, for 2018, only 41% of RAF personnel describe themselves as satisfied with service life in general, and only 32% report having high morale. We all know why morale is not as high as it should be.

Our second concern is about equipment, particularly the replacement of Sentry, the RAF's airborne warning and control system aircraft. The concern is that the Ministry of Defence is having single-source discussions, with one company, Boeing, for its E-7 Wedgetail aircraft. The concern has been expressed by the Defence Committee, and it is shared by the Opposition. Our concern is essentially that there is a lack of openness and basic

competition. Of course, in some circumstances, it is not appropriate to have competition, but in many circumstances it is entirely appropriate, and this is a case in point. It would be far better if we could see what the options are and then decide what the best one is. I would welcome any assurances from the Minister on future single-source contracts and on how exactly the MOD will do these things in future.

I conclude by paying tribute once again to the RAF in this extremely important year. In his overview of the defence combat strategy, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier made absolutely clear what the RAF's mission has been historically, what it is today and what it will be in the future. He stated that the RAF's mission is to provide:

"An agile, adaptable and capable air force that, person for person, is second to none, and that makes a decisive air power contribution in support of the UK Defence Mission".

I think that is a good summation of what the RAF should be about, is about and will continue to be about.

9.49 pm

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):**

What a pleasure it is to wind up this fantastic debate. I am under strict instructions to sit down at five minutes to 10, so I can only apologise in advance to any colleagues I do not respond to. I offer the assurance that I will write to them.

I am grateful for the contributions to this debate on the centenary of the Royal Air Force. I declare my interest as a former air cadet who went on to do a Royal Air Force flying scholarship. I have very warm memories of the Royal Air Force, although I fear it does not have such warm memories of me as, having got my pilot's licence, I promptly joined the Army.

I join hon. and right hon. Members in offering my congratulations on what has been an outstanding and very well run campaign this year. RAF100 has been a great success in reaching out to communities across the United Kingdom. This has truly been a celebration for everyone, from all walks of life, and has provided the British public with a real insight into what it means to be part of the Royal Air Force. Some 165,564 people came into contact with the Royal Air Force baton as it toured the country.

I cannot overstate the valuable contribution that the brave men and women of the Royal Air Force have made to the defence of this country over the past 100 years. As the Defence Secretary said, the flypast represented the impressive past and current capabilities. The Royal Air Force is already looking to the future beyond conventional capabilities to cyber and space. It is only fitting that all of us in the House take the time to thank the RAF for what it has achieved and to wish it well for the future.

Looking to the future has driven much of the debate. It has given us a glimpse of the huge range of tasks and missions that the men and women across the Royal Air Force conduct on a daily basis. It has also given us an opportunity to reflect on the proud traditions and achievements that the Royal Air Force is built upon. Of course, we have also considered what the Royal Air Force of the future will look like.

I will now comment on just a few of the contributions. The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) asked about our maritime patrol aircraft. As she knows, the

UK is investing in nine Boeing P-8 maritime patrol aircraft to further improve the protection of our nuclear deterrent and our new aircraft carriers. [*Interruption.*] I realise she is not listening to my response to her speech. We are also on track to achieve the initial operating capability for carrier strike operations by the end of 2020, and the inaugural operational deployment is planned for 2021. Finally, she asked about pilots. The military flying training system has experienced the biggest transformation in a generation, and we will provide a world-class global exemplar for the air training solution.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) rightly paid tribute to the Royal Auxiliary Air Force in his constituency. Indeed, he mentioned that the origin of RAF Leuchars was, of course, the Royal Engineers balloon corps. It is interesting how, 100 years on, we go back because 71 Engineer Regiment is currently headquartered at RAF Leuchars—I am a fellow Royal Engineer.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the British Armed Forces Federation. When I asked him for evidence, he said the proposal was in the manifesto on which his party returned 35 Members of Parliament at the last general election. I gently point out that that is a reduction of 21 Members on the previous Parliament, when it was not in his party's manifesto.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) highlighted the importance of Farnborough and how the biennial air show acts as a focus for innovation in his area. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), or Madam President, rightly highlighted the international composition of the Royal Air Force. I took great pleasure in accompanying my Polish counterpart to the Polish war memorial at RAF Northolt, where 303 Squadron did so much in the second world war.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) summed up the feelings of so many who may not have a personal connection with the Royal Air Force but who have a deep-seated admiration for it. The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) spoke fondly of her constituency's association with the Royal Air Force, particularly the historical manufacturing links, and her constituents' eagerness to maintain those links, which I know is mirrored across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) rightly highlighted the contribution of the RAF Regiment, which since 1941 has so successfully acted as force protection for the RAF. Only last week I met members of 7 Force Protection Wing at RAF Coningsby, and I met the joint terminal attack controllers who provide the critical link between air and surface forces, and who achieved such success in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) reminded us of the celebrations and the travels of the RAF baton, and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) highlighted the great role of Johnny Johnson, the last of the dambusters, and the vital contribution that air cadet organisations make to the lives of young people. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), next to the hon. Member for Bridgend, is one of the RAF's great champions, and he will be delighted that as of 2019 there will be a Northern Ireland university air squadron. My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) highlighted not only his strong family links, but the importance and enabling function of RAF Brize Norton, and the global reach of the C-17.

In opening, the Chairman of the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), made the incredibly valuable point that the RAF is all about people. On that note, may I simply congratulate all hon. Members who have contributed. I will write to any hon. Member who has not—

**Wayne David** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Is the Minister giving way or has he finished? I think he has finished.

**Mark Lancaster** *indicated assent.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the 100 year anniversary of the Royal Air Force.

**Martin Whitfield:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am slightly disappointed to note that on a social media platform a newspaper in this country is tweeting out that only Conservative Members took part in this debate. How can I put it on the record that Members from all across this House, on both sides, contributed to this debate?

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation. Any such report suffers from the disadvantage of being wrong.

#### **DELEGATED LEGISLATION (INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY)**

*Ordered,*

That the Motion in the name of Andrea Leadsom relating to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Paul Maynard.*)

## **Joint Committee on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill**

9.56 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):**  
I beg to move,

That this House concurs with the Lords Message of Tuesday 23 October, that it is expedient that a Joint Committee of Lords and Commons be appointed to consider and report on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill presented to both Houses on Thursday 18 October 2018 (Cm 9710), and that the Committee should report on the draft Bill by Thursday 28 March 2019;

That a Select Committee of six Members be appointed to join with a committee to be appointed by the Lords for this purpose;

That the Committee shall have power:

- (i) to send for persons, papers and records;
- (ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;
- (iii) to report from time to time;
- (iv) to appoint specialist advisers; and
- (v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom.

That the quorum of the Committee shall be three; and

That Neil Gray, Meg Hillier, Mr David Jones, Sir Edward Leigh, Dame Caroline Spelman and Mark Tami be members of the Committee.

As a unique UNESCO world heritage site, with more than 7,500 people working in here and more than 1 million visitors each year, the Palace of Westminster is an asset to our nation and the seat of our democracy. Members of both Houses have made their views clear on how best to carry out the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, and the Government are responding accordingly. Since becoming Leader of the House of Commons, I have been determined to get on with the job in hand, as this place is in urgent need of repair. So last month, the Government published the draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, giving effect to the resolutions passed earlier this year.

The draft Bill facilitates the decision taken by Parliament to set up a sponsor board and delivery authority to progress a programme of comprehensive works on the Palace of Westminster. The Bill has been developed in close consultation with the House authorities, and will put in place the rigorous and transparent governance structure we need to drive the work forward, while ensuring that we focus on value for money for the taxpayer. The sponsor body will have a majority of parliamentarians on its board, alongside experienced external members. Once a concept design, proposed funding envelope and estimated schedule for the programme have been developed as part of an outline business case, they will need to be approved by both Houses. The sponsor body will also be required, should there be any changes afterwards, to return to Parliament for approval to make any significant changes to the approved proposals in respect of the Palace. The Government agree with Parliament that there can be no blank cheque for this work and it must represent good value for taxpayers' money. So Parliament will be given the opportunity to vote on the annual expenditure of the sponsor body and the delivery authority, through the estimates process.

Currently, there is a shadow sponsor board in place, which convened its first meeting in September. The board is expected to meet monthly, but in the early days

and around the transition to statutory status, more time commitment is likely to be required. The most senior official in each of the shadow bodies, the sponsor board and the delivery authority will act as its senior responsible officer during the shadow phase. As SRO, he or she will be accountable to the two accounting officers in each House for the parts of the programme that they have accountability for.

To conclude, we need to ensure that we achieve the aims of a restoration and renewal programme that is sufficiently independent, transparent and accountable to Parliament. I am extremely grateful to all those Members who have agreed to play their part in the Joint Committee, and in particular to my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who has agreed to chair the Committee. Should the House agree to the motion, I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the Joint Committee's work.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House concurs with the Lords Message of Tuesday 23 October, that it is expedient that a Joint Committee of Lords and Commons be appointed to consider and report on the Draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill presented to both Houses on Thursday 18 October 2018 (Cm 9710), and that the Committee should report on the draft Bill by Thursday 28 March 2019.

*Ordered,*

That a Select Committee of six Members be appointed to join with a committee to be appointed by the Lords for this purpose;

That the Committee shall have power:

- (i) to send for persons, papers and records;
- (ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;
- (iii) to report from time to time;
- (iv) to appoint specialist advisers; and
- (v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom.

That the quorum of the Committee shall be three; and

That Neil Gray, Meg Hillier, Mr David Jones, Sir Edward Leigh, Dame Caroline Spelman and Mark Tami be members of the Committee.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

## **Business without Debate**

### **HOME AFFAIRS**

*Ordered,*

That Kirstene Hair be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Chris Green be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

### **WELSH AFFAIRS**

*Ordered,*

That Simon Hoare be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Jack Lopresti be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

### **WOMEN AND EQUALITIES**

*Ordered,*

That Kirstene Hair be discharged from the Women and Equalities Committee and Anna Soubry be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

## WORK AND PENSIONS

*Ordered,*

That Justin Tomlinson be discharged from the Work and Pensions Committee and Derek Thomas be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the debate on the Royal Air Force's 100th anniversary, I intended to draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests before I spoke. I am afraid it slipped my mind, but may I correct the record now?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation, and I think the House appreciates the promptness with which he has done so.

## College of West Anglia and Worksop Football Academy

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

10.1 pm

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Mr Speaker, what long hours you have been working today. I have an important issue to raise. It is relevant to my constituency and the Minister is well aware of it, and I suggest to the Minister that it has wider resonance beyond my constituency. It is one example, although not isolated, of a significant problem that afflicts further education and the use of sports academies.

In January 2015, the *Worksop Guardian* ran a report on its website—it was later in the newspaper and on the local football club's website—that outlined how a football academy was to be established in Worksop by Doncaster College, in partnership with Worksop Town football club. The report stated:

“Worksop Town hope to give local youngsters a future in football or guide them into further education, through their new Football Academy.”

It went on:

“Students will combine daily training sessions and matches with classroom studies, under the watchful eye of teaching staff from Doncaster College.”

The academy would offer academic qualifications, the possibility of going on to study at university, and perhaps a scholarship to America, with level 1, 2 or 3 BTEC sports diplomas, worth up to three A-levels, for each participant. According to the paper, Mr Russ Horsley, the sports academy development manager at Doncaster College, called it an exciting partnership

“in line with our new academy of sport”

founded by Doncaster College.

Unfortunately, having made this great announcement, Doncaster College did not fulfil that commitment to establish a football academy with Worksop Town football club, although the community and I discovered that only some years later. Instead, the contract went via another college, the College of West Anglia, which, at the time and throughout the existence of the academy, neither I nor anybody else in my constituency, or anybody connected with Worksop and Worksop Town football club, had any knowledge of or indeed had even heard of. The college subcontracted to a company called GEMEG whose director was one Russell Horsley, the major shareholder and company secretary since he formed the company in 2011. That is the same Russell Horsley who was the sports development manager at Doncaster College who had announced the initial partnership.

The Minister should be aware that the local further education college—known as North Notts College at the time—tried particularly hard to get in on the act and run this football academy with the local football club, but it was told in no uncertain terms that there was a better deal with Doncaster College. Despite my interventions on behalf of my local college, we were rebuffed and told that this was a perfect relationship.

What transpired was not quite what had been promised. The College of West Anglia was not known to us. It had previously had a relationship in a sports location called Gresham, near West Bridgford, just by the city of

[John Mann]

Nottingham. It was around an hour from my constituency—about 50 miles away. It was a place that none of my constituents had ever visited and a place that I had never heard of until I discovered that, apparently, the young trainees of the academy from Worksop were all at Gresham for the first six months of their £168,000 Government-funded course. I was able to demonstrate very quickly, within minutes, that zero of my constituents had ever visited Gresham. Most had never visited Nottingham. None of them had heard of the College of West Anglia. Their course had been in Worksop, and yet the College of West Anglia claimed—and has claimed right up to this year—that these students were being trained in Nottingham.

According to West Anglia, during a visit on 8 February 2016, no learners or staff were present. This cannot be a surprise because no learners had ever visited this establishment, yet the college, having taken £168,000 in Government money, was maintaining that it was delivering, through a subcontractor, this fantastic course in Gresham. With all the standards required, it said that it was guaranteeing the health and safety and the quality of the teaching and the output, but this never actually took place; it was a fiction, a fantasy. There were, of course, zero health and safety assessments, and zero quality assessment of what was going on in Worksop, which, suffice it to say, was not a success. This course cost £168,000 and nobody completed it—nobody, not a single student. The students had a bit of a view on it.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to the House. Does he not agree that this case highlights very clearly the importance of accountability and traceability of public funds? May I congratulate him on the important, vital and creditable work that he has done in bringing this scandal to light?

**John Mann:** Absolutely.

What was the College of West Anglia doing with £168,000 of taxpayers' money? Well, I can tell the House what it was not doing. It was not funding food for any of the trainees, who were expected to pay "£3 a day for food at a pub".

That was part of the course for every trainee every day. The trainees were also required to pay "£70 for training kit". They were not assessed for bursaries. Now, I have met a lot of these students. I know my constituents; I have looked at their addresses. I know that most of them would have got a bursary. A girl with dyslexia would have got a good bursary under disability discrimination provisions. But they could not get a bursary because they were not assessed for one. Some should have received free meals, but they were not assessed for free meals.

The students should have been given the equipment they required to carry out the course, but they were charged for the training kit and were required to buy their own computers to take into a classroom. But it was not a classroom. In fact, this was a further subcontract because Worksop Town's ground and clubhouse—known to the fans as "the bar"—in which this course took place is subcontracted from another organisation. So the College of West Anglia subcontracts to a company

called GEMEG, which partly subcontracts to Worksop Town football club, which subcontracts part of the facility from another outfit and pays £2,800 for the privilege of doing so.

No travel costs were paid, unlike many other colleges with bursaries, so these young 16-year-olds had to pay to travel. One verified to me that travel was £5 a day. Another wrote to say:

"We never had set times to start and finish."

Another said:

"I coached in schools and didn't get paid."

Coached in schools? Well, hang on a minute. Where is the safeguarding in the 12 primary schools where these students were expected to coach? These students have been put at theoretical risk for the rest of their lives for any claim that could be brought against them.

The schools were also at risk because they had no idea. Many thought they were paying a company called Tiger Enterprises, owned by the manager of their local Worksop Town football club. It was Tiger Enterprises that received the fine for non-attendance, paid by cheque by one of the participants. So hang on a minute—the College of West Anglia has £168,000 of taxpayers' money, and one of its students is charged £100, which goes to a private company owned solely by the manager of the local football club, for non-attendance at the College of West Anglia course. Somebody is owed some money here—some of these students, who have some protections under the law. But the law does not really seem to have applied to them when it came to this course, this college and its actions.

Section 7 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 puts a requirement on the college for the general wellbeing of children. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 also puts a requirement on the college, but it did not even know the location of these young people. It did not know that these young people were going into primary schools—untrained and without insurance—to coach four and five-year-olds in football.

This is a shambles and a scandal. My constituents were put at risk and none of them got qualifications. Other people made money. Worksop Town managed to get £20,726 out of the £168,000 as its share of the loot for what it was providing in some way. Yet the community sports ground that provided the facility required in the course for the playing of sport is still owed over £5,000 to this very day. The College of West Anglia, having failed to deliver a course that provided any real qualifications, having received £168,000 of taxpayers' money, having failed to address safeguarding, health and safety, or quality control of any kind, and having not even known which part of Nottinghamshire, 50 miles out, these young people were at, has not even paid the bill for its course to a community club run entirely, 100%, by volunteers. That is the level of the scandal.

To reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), what is going wrong when the College of West Anglia today refuses to meet me about this and refuses to pay its debt? The chair of governors and the principal say that they have dealt with the issues, but they have not dealt with the issues of this scandal whereby they used their name to rip off the taxpayer for this money, to provide no qualifications, to put my constituents at risk, to cost my constituents money, and to leave a community sports club about

£6,000 out of pocket when most of the local kids' teams are playing football in places where they are trying to raise money for toilets and changing rooms.

I want this college to pay its due moneys immediately. But I hope, as well, that the Minister will look at a system that allows this kind of scandal to arise. It would have been perfectly feasible to deliver a good course, run well, that motivated these young people and where the vast majority of them would qualify and have the chance to go on to further things, rather than the shambles faced by 23 young people in year one and an equal number in year two who did the course a month or two before it eventually collapsed, which is how I found out about it. As for those in the Football Association and the football world who have ticked every box to endorse this and allow it to happen, where on earth were they—lacking the safeguarding that is a pre-requisite to their existence? They were not there, and they have a lot of questions to answer. I hope that the Minister is going to change the system so that money from the taxpayer and from her Department—I know she was shocked about this—is never wasted in this way again.

10.17 pm

**The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing this debate. As he knows, I really appreciate him raising his concerns with me about the educational provision delivered by the College of West Anglia at Worksop Town football club. We have discussed this case on several occasions, and he has taken a close interest in the investigation undertaken by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. When things go wrong, it is critical that, first, we do all we can to put them right—we cannot always do so, and we cannot turn back the clock—but equally important, as he rightly said, we need to look back and learn lessons to prevent them from happening again. He is right that this case has wider implications beyond those confined to Worksop Town football club and the College of West Anglia.

Subcontracted provision needs careful management. The ESFA allocates £5.7 billion annually to provide study programmes for young people. It is very important, as the hon. Gentleman said, that public funds are appropriated correctly with the interests of our young people protected. As he is aware—I hope he will forgive me if I mention a few things that it is quite important to put down for the record—the programme at Worksop Town football club was completed in 2016, and the College of West Anglia independently took the decision to terminate its contract with the subcontractor, GEMEG, from July 2016.

Once the concerns about the provision were brought to our attention, we commissioned an investigation, but it was the hon. Gentleman's efforts that brought this to a head. In June 2018, we published the findings, so that all in the sector can learn the lessons of this case. The hon. Gentleman was persistent in getting to the bottom of this case. It was clear that the original ESFA draft investigation report was not as comprehensive as it should have been, and his insistence has ensured that a full and proper report has now been published.

We are clear that the arrangement between the college and the subcontractor was unacceptable. The investigation highlighted that the college needs to carry out a full review of its subcontracting controls and assurance

systems and processes. That must include the college's process for monitoring subcontractors, as well as subcontractors' methodology for conducting enrolment, induction and initial assessment of learners.

As a result of the investigation, the College of West Anglia is barred from starting any new subcontracting arrangements for 16-to-19 learners until the ESFA is satisfied that all the proper procedures are in place. The ESFA continues to monitor progress against the college action plan, but it is not yet satisfied, and the bar on new 16-to-19 subcontracting remains in place.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of questions. He talked about the purchases that young people were required to make. Young people are quite vulnerable. In fact, they were not required to purchase sportswear that was not necessary for their learning programme, but the fine definition of that might well have been lost to some of them. Critically, the use of taxpayers' money comes into question, but as important are the young people who have been let down, and sadly we cannot turn the clock back on that. The ESFA has subsequently clarified the funding rules to ensure that in future, that distinction is made clear to students who undertake studies as part of the sports academy, so that they fully understand what is and is not essential to the completion of their programme.

The hon. Gentleman raised questions about whether students received support funding to which they may have been entitled, in respect of expenses incurred. The investigation found that some students did receive payments of bursaries. However, it is clear that the College of West Anglia and GEMEG could have done a great deal more to make learners aware of funding support, in particular helping them to evidence their eligibility to make a claim.

I commend the hon. Gentleman for his quest for answers, with the most serious question he raises being about the safeguarding of young people; nothing is more important. The investigation fully explored that area and was able to conclude that all teachers who worked with the learners had been CRB—now DBS—checked. No allegations of breaches of safeguarding were reported to the College of West Anglia while this provision was being delivered.

**John Mann:** I commend the Minister for her work and her approach throughout this unhappy episode. Safeguarding does not protect the young people who are put in the position of training four or five-year-olds without having the competence or accreditation to do so. I am pleased to inform her that Nottinghamshire County Council has agreed that a gold-plated qualification on top of all existing requirements is now the aim for anyone who does sports coaching in schools in Nottinghamshire. Is that not a great step forward?

**Anne Milton:** It is an important step forward, and I congratulate Nottinghamshire County Council. Safeguarding and anything to do with the training of young people should be gold-plated; it is as simple as that. Nothing less than the best will do, particularly in this day and age, when we hear of so many cases where things have gone wrong.

As a result of this case, the College of West Anglia is prevented from entering into any further subcontracting arrangements until it has provided evidence of independently verified improvements in its arrangements

[Anne Milton]

for control and quality assurance of subcontracting and has systematically addressed all the recommendations in the report.

This is a worrying case, and the report reached a number of conclusions highlighting areas of concern about where controls were simply completely inadequate. However, the lessons learned are being used to improve the experience for learners. The ESFA has revised its guidance and rules on subcontracting. It has also set in motion a wider review of its monitoring and enforcement of subcontracting rules across all post-16 funding. That review is due to reach its conclusions shortly, and it is already highlighting areas where we can learn lessons from such cases.

From 2019, the ESFA will introduce an annual review of subcontracting for all providers that subcontract. That will look across ESFA programmes, including 16-19 funding, the adult education budget, apprenticeships and the European social fund. It will protect students by looking for signs of non-compliance and checking with main providers that the rules are being followed. It is all very well to have rules, but one actually has to check that they are followed.

It is vital that directly funded organisations properly monitor and control all subcontracted delivery. They must ensure that safeguarding is rigorously policed, that students enjoy the same entitlements as those learning in schools and colleges, and that their education is of high quality. There are huge opportunities for young people if this is done well.

Linked to this case, the ESFA has taken the opportunity to review and strengthen the funding guidance for subcontracting and how it relates specifically to sports academies. Specifically, the rules state it is essential that the delivery of the ESFA-funded programme and the delivery of the academy or club's activities are distinct from each other and, critically, that students understand the rules and requirements pertaining to each. The rules have been strengthened to emphasise that directly funded institutions are responsible for all aspects of provision delivered under subcontracting arrangements.

We have met the Football Association to raise concerns about the risks associated with sports academies. The ESFA continues to work with the FA to ensure that the

rules outlined in the guidance to their football clubs and academies are in place for the next academic year. ESFA officials have worked with the FA and developed a quality assurance framework for football clubs, which is a big step forward, and we will continue to work with them.

I commend the hon. Gentleman for his efforts to pursue this case.

**John Mann:** The FA, at an appropriate level, has been happy to meet me, and I believe it remains happy to do so. The Minister and her officials have—I think, on six occasions—deigned to meet me and have had the joy of doing so. Does she not think it is appropriate for the College of West Anglia also to enjoy the opportunity of at least one meeting with me to discuss this situation?

**Anne Milton:** I always enjoy the opportunity to meet the hon. Gentleman. In fact, I have to say to him that, as he is possibly aware, many Members of the House would perhaps have fallen at the first or second hurdle, but he persists and it is such persistence that gets results.

This is a complex situation that requires persistence and tenacity. I know that at heart what drives him is the fact that learners are being let down. That is what this is all about. It is important that we make good use of taxpayers' money, but it is the young people who suffer if we do not get it right.

The hon. Gentleman and I have a shared commitment to seeing that all young people receive a high-quality education and are safe while they do so. I am enormously grateful for the support he has given to me and my officials. He has raised important concerns, and I hope he is happy that I echo them on behalf of the Government. The steps we have taken underline the importance we place on learning lessons from this case. Where there is Government money, there will always be people trying to get around the rules—as I said in Committee recently, there are vultures out there waiting to take that money for less effort—but I hope we can move forward, that lessons have been learned and that this is an end to this sorry tale.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Monday 26 November 2018

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

## Fireworks: Public Sales

4.30 pm

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 231147 relating to the sale of fireworks to the public.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. The petition calls for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public and for a move to organised displays only. Numerous petitions about fireworks have been submitted through the Petitions Committee website; if memory serves, this is our third petitions debate about them. Debates on fireworks have also been initiated by hon. Members and numerous parliamentary questions have been asked about related issues. The Facebook page that we set up for comments on this petition has received 956 engagements and been viewed by 4,800 accounts, while more than 61,000 viewed the digital debate. That is a real measure of the public concern about the issue, which the Government ignore at their peril.

Let us be honest: a lot of us look at fireworks through the rosy glow of our childhoods, but we ought to remember that the occasions we look back on usually took place only on 5 November and were very limited in scope—in our case, it was dad letting off a few fireworks, with a packet of sparklers for the kids and a Catherine wheel that never went round properly and burned the shed door. Fireworks are now used on many more occasions. They are common at new year—when I was growing up, the most excitement we got at new year was train drivers sounding their hooters at midnight. Fireworks are also used on other occasions such as Diwali and Chinese new year, understandably, and they are even used on family occasions such as weddings and birthdays. As they have come to be used more frequently, they have grown more powerful and noisier. It was concern about that issue that led to the Fireworks Act 2003.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that at the moment perhaps one of the only things that unites the whole country is our love of animals. As she mentions, we have regulations on when fireworks can be sold but none on when they can be used. Surely, to protect our dear cats—like my beloved Thomas and Serena—from distress, there should be limits on when fireworks can be used throughout the year.

**Helen Jones:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I shall address later in my speech.

The 2003 Act, which began as a private Member's Bill but was supported by the then Labour Government, was an enabling Act that allowed Ministers to make regulations to control fireworks and explosives.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentions our laws about fireworks. Although those laws are often enforced, cuts to local authority budgets have meant that the staffing levels necessary to enforce them have fallen by more than half in the past few years. Does she agree that that makes it a lot harder to regulate the use of fireworks?

**Helen Jones:** My hon. Friend is right, and she anticipates a point that I will make later.

The Fireworks Regulations 2004 introduced a lot of rules about the sale, possession and use of fireworks. They introduced a licensing system for those who sell fireworks all year round, limited the sale by other suppliers to dates around 5 November, new year, Chinese new year and Diwali, imposed a maximum decibel level of 120, and forbade the possession of adult fireworks—those in the F2 and F3 categories—in a public place by anyone under 18. F4 fireworks, which are the most explosive, can be possessed only by fireworks professionals.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Jones:** One more time, but then I must make some progress, in fairness to those who want to speak.

**John Howell:** The hon. Lady is being generous in giving way. May I pick up on her point about decibels? There is now a whole generation of almost silent fireworks with a reduced decibel level. Does she welcome their introduction to the market?

**Helen Jones:** “Silent fireworks” is a bit of a misnomer, because they are not entirely silent. Clearly they are welcome, but they do not solve many of the other problems associated with fireworks.

The 2003 Act and the regulations made under it have gone some way towards assuaging public concern about the issue, as have the Explosives Regulations 2014 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015, which relate to the safety of fireworks as consumer products. But—and it is a big “but”—public concern seems to have risen again recently. I regularly get letters and emails at certain times of the year, as I am sure many other hon. Members do, from people who are concerned about the noise, pollution and antisocial behaviour associated with fireworks.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Helen Jones:** If hon. Members will forgive me, I need to make some progress, because a lot of Members are waiting to speak.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) mentioned, the problem is partly one of enforcement. For instance, an 11 pm curfew on fireworks is in place most of the time, with exceptions for new year and other occasions. Breaching the curfew can result in a fine, imprisonment or, if offenders are over 18, a £90 fixed penalty notice from the police. But the police have to be there to catch the perpetrators, and we have lost so many officers—21,000 since 2010—that chief constables are having to make very difficult decisions about where to deploy their personnel. Likewise, although a fixed penalty notice of £80 can be given to anyone under 18 in possession of adult fireworks, community policing has been so hollowed out that we have lost not

[Helen Jones]

only police officers but 40% of the police community support officers who might have been able to catch and report on offenders. It is therefore very difficult to enforce the regulations.

Trading standards officers in local authorities face the same problem. Councils have been hit so hard by cuts that have they have had to pull back and carry out only their statutory duties. Trading standards officers have been cut and cut, which makes it very difficult to enforce the licensing system, prevent the sale of adult fireworks to anyone under 16 or prevent the sale of more powerful fireworks to anyone under 18. Trading standards officers do a great job, but there are simply not enough of them. For the same reason, many councils have cut back on organised displays because they can simply no longer afford to put them on.

The Government need to be very clear about what is happening. In January, the last time we debated the issue, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) that he did not have statistics on the prosecution of fireworks offences because the Home Office did not collect them in that way. We do not know the trends, and we do not know about enforcement or whether it is working. One contributor to our forum wrote:

“So here we are 11 days after the official date and we are still getting fireworks being used.”

Many people have come to believe that the regulations are not being enforced. If the Government contend that the regulations are sufficient, they must ensure that the means to enforce them are in place.

Others have said clearly that they think it is time for greater regulation. One contributor said that the fireworks regulations need to be tightened, as there is enough evidence to prove that fireworks are being used inappropriately by persons willing to cause harm to people.

I have had many emails from people, as well as contributions to our Facebook page. Some have made the point that they use fireworks responsibly and without harm, which is true of many people. Some have told me, “It’s a tradition”—the good old British tradition of burning effigies of Catholics on a bonfire every 5 November, which some of us might find a little problematic, to say the least. We have even had people talking about the nanny state, and the classic, “It’s political correctness gone mad.”

I know the Government do not like regulations. Ministers always tell us how many regulations they have got rid of, but sometimes regulations are necessary for protecting the public. There is a balance to be struck in any society between the right of people to do as they wish and the harm caused to others. Let us be clear: even fireworks on sale to the public can cause significant harm. A fireworks professional said in a Facebook post that he had known even F2 and F3 fireworks to go wrong on displays, and that there would have been a serious injury had he not been wearing protective clothing. There is no such thing as a safe firework. Let us be clear: the harm they cause can be considerable.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Helen Jones:** I will take one more intervention and then I must press on.

**Alex Sobel:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. My constituents the Snell family had a dog, Queenie, who became increasingly sensitive to fireworks. A firework went off right by their house on the Wednesday after bonfire night, and Queenie became so inconsolable that she had to be euthanised. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be licensing individuals to operate fireworks, and that only they should be allowed to buy them?

**Helen Jones:** The effect on animals has been raised with me, and I shall come to that in a moment.

Let us also remember the effect on people. Last year in England alone there were 4,436 visits to A&E by people with firework injuries. That is more than double the figure of 2,141 in 2009-10. There were 168 admissions for firework injuries in 2015-16 and 184 last year. Admissions had been going down but they are now going up again. Let us remember that some of those will be catastrophic, life-changing injuries. The cost to the person concerned is incalculable, but there is also a cost to the NHS, through the strain on our A&E departments as more people are admitted. I know that family members who work in the NHS dread 5 November as much as firefighters do, because they worry about the injuries that they will see. Some are so bad that the British Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons has called for fireworks to be sold in boxes displaying pictures of injuries, rather than in what looks like packaging for sweets. It is certainly right about the packaging.

As well as injuring people, fireworks are a problem for animals, as several hon. Members have mentioned. I have been contacted by a number of people who say that their pets have to be sedated when fireworks are going off. They are supported by a number of charities, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Kennel Club and the Dogs Trust. It is fair to say that not all these charities are asking us to move to public displays only. The RSPCA wants the decibel limit reduced to 97 and would like the use of fireworks, not simply their sale, restricted to certain times of the year. It also calls for all public displays to be licensed and for residents to be able to object to the licence—something I will return to later. By contrast, the Dogs Trust would like us to move to public displays only.

Noise has an effect not just on animals, but on people. It particularly has an effect on elderly people and those with mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Shoulder to Soldier is a charity that originated in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt), and which also has an office in Howley in my constituency. It has campaigned vigorously to make people aware of the effect on some veterans of having fireworks let off near them and has been supported in that campaign by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

With the noise goes pollution. For the five days around 5 November, particulate pollution was very high in this country. On 5 November itself, towns and cities across Britain, such as Stockton, Leeds and Sheffield, reached level 10, the maximum level of pollution.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Helen Jones:** I will take one more intervention—the very last one—and then I must finish.

**Mrs Hodgson:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. On the issue of noise, 584 of my constituents have signed the petition, which is really high for my constituency. A number are concerned about the effect on animals, in particular the effect of the noise. It was also pointed out to me that a number of people will set off large amounts of fireworks at the same time, not for the effect in the sky but for the high decibel level and the noise. Is she aware that that is one of the problems we face?

**Helen Jones:** Yes, I am. My hon. Friend is quite right, and that goes back to the issue not only of regulation, but of enforcing it.

To return to pollution, we know that it has an immediate effect on people with respiratory illnesses—people, like me, who have asthma. We are also becoming increasingly aware that it has a long-term effect on children, particularly on the development of their brains and lungs. Maybe it is time to ask why we are contributing so much extra pollution.

I also want to raise the issue of the demands on emergency services, particularly the fire service. One of the pluses of coming from a very large family is that I have relatives everywhere. I did have relatives in the fire service, and they prayed for rain on some of these occasions because of the stress they put on them. In Greater Manchester this year, calls were running at one a minute at peak times. In Scotland, there were over 700 calls to 338 bonfires. A lot of those might be classified as minor fires—a fire is minor only if it can be controlled—but we should remember that while crews attend those incidents, they are not available for potentially life-threatening incidents elsewhere in their area. That means that fire engines would have to be brought from further away, and minutes count when saving a life.

If that was not bad enough, fire crews are increasingly coming under attack. I have had a number of emails from serving firefighters who raise this with me. They are quite right to do so, because even a cursory trawl through the various websites throws up lots of incidents. Crews had fireworks thrown at them in north Wales. In Manchester, a crew went out to an incident and were immediately attacked by a gang throwing fireworks. The police were called, and it took 90 minutes to bring that incident under control—90 minutes when that appliance was unavailable for a fire elsewhere. That incident also threatened the lives of the crew.

Crews have also been attacked in Scotland. In Glasgow, riot police had to be called because people were throwing fireworks at houses and cars and then at the police who came out. To see how horrific the situation is, I urge the Minister to look at a video that was put online by the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service—a firefighter elsewhere sent me the link. It shows video footage that was taken by a camera on one of their appliances. The crew come out to what looks like a fairly small fire, and they are immediately attacked by a gang of people throwing fireworks at them. It is really horrific. Why are we subjecting our emergency services—not just the fire service, but ambulance crews and the police—to that kind of attack, day in, day out, year after year?

People will say, “Well, fireworks don’t cause antisocial behaviour.” Of course they do not. Knives do not cause knifings and chemicals do not cause blinding, but we regulate them because they can be used to ill effect. The same is true of fireworks. It is time we moved forward with this issue. I love a fireworks display, but I am happy to watch an organised display somewhere where everyone is safe.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Helen Jones:** I am going to wind up, if my hon. Friend will permit me.

Even organised displays need regulating. I was struck by an email I received from a lady who lives in a small village near a wedding venue, which has had display after display this year. She said that, each time, the residents have to be out with their animals in the fields to stop them from panicking. She told me that she lost a Jacob lamb because the ewe ran away frightened and would not come back. Another person said on our website that, as an agricultural worker, they have seen too many horrific injuries to their horses and other animals. Let us remember that we are talking not simply about pets, but about people’s livelihoods. We ought to bear that in mind.

It is time to act. If the Government are not prepared simply to move to organised displays, there are other things that they could do. They could raise the age for buying fireworks or restrict use, as well as sale, to certain times of the year. They could ensure that the police and local authorities are given the wherewithal to enforce the regulations. If they will the ends, they have got to will the means.

I must confess that I am a reluctant convert to organised displays, but I do not believe that continuing things as they are is worth the NHS admissions, the attacks on emergency service personnel or even one child being seriously burned and blinded. We will have petition after petition and debate after debate until the Government start to take notice. This is becoming a serious issue about public order and antisocial behaviour. It is time that the Government took it seriously and acted on it.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** Order. This debate can go on until 7.30 pm, so there is plenty of time. We have been notified that 12 hon. Members would like to speak. It will be easy to get everyone in if they exercise just a bit of self-restraint.

4.53 pm

**Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe.

We nurture and protect our children as they grow up, testing the temperature of the bath water, ensuring fireguards are in situ, and teaching them not to play with matches and lighters, so why do we permit them fireworks, despite the law? In my youth, the content of a box of fireworks was usually a rocket to be launched from an empty milk bottle, a Catherine wheel to be pinned to a tree trunk or the shed door, a banger, a sparkler or even a jumping jack—I understand that

[Bill Grant]

they have wisely been banned. They were fun; I should not really say that, but that was when I was a kid. It was quite some time ago that I had access to fireworks as a child. Nowadays, the pyrotechnics are powerful. The colourful and dynamic packaging and posters are clearly aimed at enticing people to purchase fireworks. I appreciate that there is an age limit on purchases, but regrettably, in many instances, they still fall into younger, inexperienced hands.

All emergency services, including accident and emergency, view 5 November with trepidation, not so much because it is one of the busiest days of the year, but because of the casualties—in the main young people, who are injured or maimed for life. Jack Kirkland, in his book “Blue lights and bandages”, in which he recounts his experiences as a member of the Scottish Ambulance Service, speaks graphically of many bonfire night injuries, including that of a boy who had been carrying fireworks in his pockets when they went off, causing serious burns and injuries, which he carries to this day.

I was a fire officer for 31 years, and I have seen for myself horrific injuries from stray or thrown fireworks. The problem relates not just to the visible, physical injuries, but to the hidden acoustic stress to humans, pets and other animals, and there is the potential to cause further mental trauma for those with post-traumatic stress disorder. As was said earlier, fire crews can be set up: a 999 call is made, but when the crew arrive they receive an onslaught of fireworks, which have been lawfully and legally bought—often from reputable retailers, but more often from pop-up shops that appear over towns for that occasion. Just as worrying is the fact that Police Scotland recently identified the misuse of fireworks and smoke bombs in sports stadiums as a growing issue.

If hon. Members need evidence to convince them, the website of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents states:

“Injury figures support the advice that the safest place to enjoy fireworks is at a large public display—far fewer people are injured here than at smaller family or private parties”

where there is no control over the fireworks that are ignited or detonated. The British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons said that

“in 2017-18, 4,435 people”

—a phenomenal figure—

“were admitted to A&E due to firework injuries; the majorities of these patients were boys under the age of 18”,

who had clearly accessed and possibly misused fireworks.

**Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I vividly remember being at school and having to dodge my way along the path to the front gates in the run-up to 5 November and afterwards to avoid the fireworks flying overhead. Fireworks are clearly getting into the wrong hands. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if they were invented tomorrow, we would never allow them to be on sale so freely?

**Bill Grant:** I wholeheartedly agree. Despite the law and the regulations, fireworks are so easy to purchase. Pop-up shops that come to our towns sell them to whoever has the money. Perhaps the reputable retailers

do that less so, but we have to ask ourselves, as parliamentarians and parents, why should fireworks be on sale on our high streets?

I support a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public. I would prefer organised events by certified, competent persons, who would carry out risk assessments and put in place control zones to ensure public safety. That would be a sensible thing to do, and it would allow people still to enjoy organised events. I do not want to ban fireworks entirely, but they should be used at proper organised events.

If the Government will not ban fireworks, and I think that is their position, we should at least consider applying standards similar to those used for other items that have the potential adversely to affect public health. For example, in recent years, the packaging, display and advertising of cigarettes have been muted. Should it not be the same for fireworks?

It has been suggested that graphics depicting horrendous injuries would deter some from purchasing fireworks, but if we think of the many graphic games that young people play on their computer consoles, which show scenes of terror and horror, might we not just be whetting their appetite with such packaging? I would prefer plain, unattractive packaging. I am also fearful that graphic packaging could cause distress to those suffering from PTSD.

I spoke in a fireworks debate earlier in the year, and I recently hosted a drop-in session in Westminster for MPs that was co-organised by the Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the Kennel Club. About 40 MPs signed up and undertook to consider introducing further restrictions around the sale of fireworks, such as limiting them to licensed public occasions and organised events. One recommendation was that local authorities should pay attention to the location for which a licence was sought, and that if one was granted, pet owners within a given radius should receive adequate notification so that they could make the necessary preparations—almost like neighbour notification.

I would thought have that, although individual fireworks in categories F1 to F3 may contain only small quantities of explosive, we should, in the interest of security, be eliminating the potential for someone to amass fireworks for illicit purposes by placing a ban on their sale to the general public.

If the UK Government do not back legislation introducing an outright ban on the sale of fireworks to the public, I ask the Minister to consider amendments to plug potential loopholes in the existing legislation. I appreciate that responsibility for fireworks is split between the UK and Scottish Governments: the former regulate their sale as a consumer safety issue, while responsibility for the use of fireworks has been devolved to the latter under the Fireworks (Scotland) Regulations 2004. The Scottish Government will carry out a consultation on the use and regulation of fireworks in Scotland, including on ways to reduce antisocial impact of fireworks, and I, for one, welcome that consultation.

I would, however, ask both Governments to consider the following scenario, which my constituents have drawn to my attention fairly recently. In my constituency of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock, there are many stunning venues for special events such as weddings, and a growing

tendency—strangely—for fireworks to feature as part of those celebrations. Such events are more frequent than the annual Guy Fawkes night and, as some venues are situated in residential areas or near livestock facilities, neighbour nuisance is a very real issue.

Constituents advise me that some venues devolve responsibility for the fireworks display to the customer, who engages a private company that sets up the system and lets off the fireworks from nearby private land, which makes it extremely difficult for local authority officers to police events and take any follow-up action. If the existing legislation does not catch such creative arrangements, surely Governments need to be equally creative to protect the wider public, taking account of proportionality and balance of convenience.

I say to the Minister that it strikes me as strange that, given the innovation and the availability of silent fireworks and light shows, we have not moved on as a nation and, as has been mentioned, are still repeatedly debating the contentious matter of fireworks and the distress and the injury they cause not only to humans, but to pets, livestock and wild animals. Years later, we are still dealing with the issue of fireworks—do we really need them? Let us give due consideration to introducing regulation to reflect a modern approach to fireworks, reduce injuries and prevent unnecessary trauma to humans, pets and domestic animals.

5.2 pm

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I enjoy taking part in e-petition debates, because although our world is governed by the parliamentary timetable, which often relates to Brexit, e-petitions are a good insight into what people are talking about and what they care about—they reflect thoughts that have captured the moment. Petitioners would not get to 100,000 signatures by getting 100 every day for 1,000 days. That is not how it works; it is about capturing the energy. The level of support for the petition, as well as the time of year that it was garnered, shows that it has captured a mood. It is important that we have a proper debate about it, and that the Government act and are clear about how they intend to do so.

When I talk to people in my constituency of Nottingham North, I hear familiar refrains—I suspect hon. Members will have heard the same in their communities—such as, “Bonfire night used to mean fireworks a couple of nights a year but now it means a good fortnight or so of disruption,” or “Fireworks are being set off earlier and earlier every year”. By any measure, there has been a fundamental shift in the availability of fireworks and in the way that people view them.

My interest in the subject is not about banning a good public fireworks display. For families and everyone else in the community, it is an event on the annual calendar on which we come together and enjoy an exhilarating night. I do not seek to discourage such events, which are traditions just like Christmas, Easter, Halloween and new year’s eve. As long as they are done properly, with safe displays and people who know what they are doing, these events are safe and exciting fun for everyone in the community.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): We have an enormous fireworks display in the centre of Ipswich every year. Getting on for half the population of Ipswich seems to

turn up. It is a wonderful occasion that is not just about fireworks—people come together for singing, dancing and food—and it is all absolutely safe. Does my hon. Friend agree that such events are the way forward?

**Alex Norris:** I think I shall be going to Ipswich next November—that sounds wonderful. The situation is very much the same in Nottingham; we have big events, and they are a good way to celebrate and enjoy. The petition shows that it is the things happening beyond those events, in our streets and in our parks, that cause real distress. Technology has moved on and the availability of fireworks has changed, and we have to move with the times.

I am conscious of time and know that many colleagues wish to speak, so I will come to my focus, which is the impact of prolonged periods of firework displays on household pets and the lives of their owners. Since my election to Parliament, I have been working closely on that with the Dogs Trust, and am keen to continue supporting them in championing the issue. I am the proud owner of two border collies, Boomer and Corona, who are such wonderful border collies that, as Members might know, they were joint winners of this year’s Westminster Dog of the Year competition. Please excuse that digression—I tell everyone that I meet. That can never be taken off me. The theme of the competition this year was fireworks, and the reason that we won was that Corona is particularly badly affected by them. We talked about some of the coping strategies we have developed, which I will touch on shortly. One of my commitments as an MP is to tackle the issue and it is something I am keen to do.

We are a nation of animal lovers, and that is not just about dogs. Cats Protection, Blue Cross, the Kennel Club, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and many others have called for action. For these charities and more, it is clear that the sheer number of fireworks displays that take place in the UK around bonfire night is having a detrimental impact on animal welfare. I use the word “display” broadly; this is not just about organised displays, but all fireworks events—from someone letting one off in a park, to the full-blown displays.

Why is it such a problem? Why, as a pet owner and having spoken to pet owners in my constituency, do I think that the issue requires action now? As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) said, people have been setting off fireworks in their gardens for years. What has changed? Well, the situation is different in terms of the scale and availability of fireworks. From 1 November—if not from Halloween, but certainly from the moment it has passed—pet owners get home from work, it is already dark as the clocks have changed, and they know they are going to have a shivering pet to deal with. They try to do all the things they need to do when they get home, but cannot take the dog out because it is petrified and, when there are fireworks going off, the dog might not want to walk or will not walk on certain streets, which is also a problem.

Dog owners might unlock their front door to be greeted by their dog cowering in the corner, and spend their time trying to ameliorate that with whatever tactics they can. We put a shirt on Corona, which acts like a swaddling coat, and that eases it a bit. Others have other solutions. That takes time and—I do not have children, but I suspect that this is analogous to having a baby—

[Alex Norris]

the moment we get peace and think “We have resolved this for now”, it starts again, because somebody else on the road is letting off fireworks. Whole evenings can pass like this, with no peace for the pet. Critically, that happens not just on 5 November, but from Halloween and, for us, it went on for a good week afterwards this year.

We accept that on 5 November, fireworks are inescapable, so our coping mechanism for bonfire night was to put our two dogs in the boot of the car and drive to the middle of nowhere. We thought, “Let’s try and get out of the city, as far away as we can”, and as hon. Members can imagine, that is actually really hard. Part of the problem with the countryside is that sound carries, and clearly we are such city dwellers that we had not grasped that. We spent our evening sat in the middle of Derbyshire.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Quite frankly, my hon. Friend should not have to do that—that is the nub of the problem. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), and I am sure that she would agree that we have debated this issue like nobody’s business over the years, but nothing seems to happen. We must look at the manufacture and contents of fireworks and at how they are policed, while certain events should require licences. The weakness in the system is the lack of trading standards officers to police fireworks. Why should the police have to do the job of trading standards officers?

**Alex Norris:** As a local authority councillor in the years before I was elected to this place, I had an excellent relationship with trading standards and would always stand up for their work keeping dodgy booze and fags out of children’s hands. Fireworks are another good example of their excellent work but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North said, they also have considerably diminished resources.

On 10 November, the night before Armistice Day, which was a Saturday this year, my wife and I went to a dinner near the city of Nottingham to commemorate it with the Western Front Association. Just before there had been a big flurry of fireworks, although the 10th is getting on for a week after bonfire night. It was a black-tie dinner—not what I am used to going to—but we had to take the dog with us. We went to this incredible dinner at Nottinghamshire County Council’s county hall and we had the dog in the boot, because in a dark, enclosed space he was a little happier. We were able to keep popping out to see that he was all right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) said, it just should not have to be that way. We are in no way unique.

Fireworks are now commonplace for birthday parties, family celebrations and lots of other things. We do not want to stamp out that joy—we are at our worst if we look like killjoys or as if we are humourless—but we have to accept that things are different, and we now have a night-time wall of noise stretching from the beginning of November for pushing a fortnight.

Fireworks may be sold by any person over the age of 18 between 7 am and 11 pm every day of the year. There is no legal requirement to have any form of licence, or training to set them up, once they have been bought.

There are not many comparable situations in which we so willingly hand explosives over to people who do not know how to use them, other than by reading the leaflet. That does not seem like a good idea. It is easier than ever to put on private displays, and people are clearly choosing to do so.

In the run-up to 5 November this year, I did a campaign in conjunction with the Dogs Trust to raise awareness of some of the real issues pets face at this time of year and to encourage people positively to behave differently. We highlighted some of the key tips suggested by the Dogs Trust, such as attending organised community displays to reduce neighbourhood disturbance, limiting fireworks displays to half an hour if they are set off in your garden, or—a big one, which we would have really appreciated—people letting their neighbours know in advance when they plan to set off fireworks so that those neighbours can plan what to do. On 5 November, we knew that our neighbour would be letting off fireworks right next to our house, so we knew that we had to get out the house.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Using fireworks illegally could result in prosecution, a fine of up to £5,000 and a prison sentence of up to six months, or an on-the-spot fine of £90. Does my hon. Friend agree that were the existing laws enforced, a lot of the issues would be solved, but that the laws are not being enforced?

**Alex Norris:** Yes, of course. Sanctions are only as strong as their enforcement regime. Without trading standards or community policing to enforce the powers, they will fundamentally not act as a deterrent. I take that point on board.

To conclude, as a Parliament we have been given a clear nudge from people who want us to think about all that. I have not been in this place a long time, but this request is clearly not before us for the first time. People are looking to see that we get it on this issue. The nature of how fireworks are used has changed, so Parliament needs to consider it and, ultimately, the Government need to act. If they believe that the regulations are sufficient, they should be very clear about that and about the enforcement toolkit involved. Pets give us so much, and having them is certainly a big part of my life. It sounds funny to say that I am in the Chamber today to stand up for pets and animals in general—they do not have a vote at the ballot box, but I do not care about that. Fundamentally, fireworks can cause an awful lot of distress and it is time we acted.

5.13 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, and to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris).

When the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) started her speech, she made a throwaway remark about how, when we think about fireworks, we might look back to our childhoods. I do not look back to my childhood when thinking about fireworks, because the displays I attended were absolutely awful.

I have three reasons for not looking back to those firework displays with much enthusiasm. First, I do not think much of Guy Fawkes night. Why we celebrate the

burning of a Catholic on that occasion is bizarre. Why we go to the effort of throwing the guy on the fire and letting off fireworks in celebration of it seems strange. Secondly, enormous effort is put into letting off fireworks and, frankly, I found that effort too much when I had smaller children and was a child myself. Thirdly, for many years, until she died, I had a Labrador as a pet. We, too, had to take measures to ensure that she was out of the way when firework displays took place.

I do, however, like some displays. Almost every year on new year's eve, I come to the House of Commons, partly for the sociability of the occasion, but also to see the Eye firework display across the Thames, which is spectacular. We can look at the displays that take place in other parts of the world—Sydney, for example—but the display put on from the Eye by the London authorities shows this city as the brilliant city that it really is. I enjoy that myself, and bringing friends and family.

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a rather curmudgeonly speech about fireworks, if he does not mind me saying so. I understand the point he makes about the huge display here in London, but a great deal of enjoyment is found by many different people in smaller displays in their local communities. My children greatly enjoy going to our back window to see the displays over Chesterfield, such as on fireworks night. Smaller displays can be tremendously enjoyable, but we are all concerned about those people who use them irresponsibly or cause danger. They are the ones we want to clamp down on.

**John Howell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I will try to be less curmudgeonly. I did not intend to sound like that, and am sorry it came across that way.

I was introduced to this subject by my local paper, the *Henley Standard*, which before Guy Fawkes this year ran a campaign, Ban the Bangs. I fully support it, though I had some observations to make about it. The people who participated in the campaign were principally pet owners—dog and cat owners—and one said that she and her dog “tremble uncontrollably” and “are very, very upset”. It is important to bear that in mind.

The campaign was trying to push people to go to organised displays. Despite comments that have been made, in my constituency such displays are organised not just by the district and county councils but by individual parish councils—I will come on to say something about that—which are good displays organised by the parish councillors themselves.

I was struck by something said by one of the participants in the campaign:

“I don't want to spoil people's fun but why are they so loud?”

That is an important point: we do not want to spoil people's fun, but why are fireworks so loud?

The hon. Member for Warrington North referred to silent fireworks in response to my intervention. I appreciate that they are not entirely silent, but they are a lot more so and they could play a part in dealing with the situation, although they do not take away the whole problem. They take away the noise problem and the argument about fireworks being very loud, but they do not take away the problem of flashes, which often cause the most distress to animals. Many animals can cope with the increased noise—they cope with things such as

traffic backfiring all the time—but they cannot cope with the sudden flashes. Although silent fireworks have their role to play, they do not answer the whole question.

There is a tremendous amount in the idea of us working together to provide organised displays for people to go to. The parish council of the village that I used live in was a little like Ipswich, I think, in that it organised a display each year on the green, which the whole village came to. It was always well organised. I cannot recall in the 20-odd years that I lived there ever seeing an accident there, and it was a good illustration of what can be achieved.

I understand the need for the campaign, but—perhaps I am being curmudgeonly again—we ought to push for intelligence, common sense and courtesy to rule, three of the rarest elements in the universe. We should push for intelligence on how to use fireworks, common sense in how to organise an event, and courtesy, which the hon. Member for Nottingham North spoke of, to tell people when we are planning to have a display. The Government have some public awareness: they produce “Celebrating with bonfires and fireworks: a community guide.” It is time that that was updated to take into account the sort of activities organised by councils, so that they would be as safe as they could be.

I return to where I started: I like the big firework displays—I love the one in London—but, quite honestly, if I had to give up one for the other, I would happily give up the individual displays and go for the big displays that have all the razzmatazz I am looking for. Every new year, I stand open mouthed watching the display at the London Eye. It adds quite a lot to this city.

5.22 pm

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for opening today's timely and topical debate and for covering so much of the territory.

Complaints about fireworks are an annual and seasonal occurrence, as I evidence in my office, and I have no doubt they increase year on year. I am grateful for the work of the Firework Abatement campaign, which has highlighted hundreds of incidents that have occurred, mostly from October onwards, and it sums up the problem succinctly as random and unexpected use. I have certainly seen evidence of that in my office, which has been inundated by complaints since October. It came as no surprise, when I saw the statistics on this e-petition, to discover that the West Lothian and Falkirk constituencies were among the top for signatories to the e-petition. Livingston came out top, followed by Linlithgow and East Falkirk, and Falkirk had the fifth-most signatories. Scottish constituencies were more likely to have a higher level of signatories on this issue than on many of the e-petitions I have seen.

I welcome the fact that Scotland is to have a consultation on fireworks next year. The regulation of the sale of fireworks is regarded as a consumer safety issue and, as such, is a reserved matter. The Scottish Government Minister for Community Safety, Ash Denham, wrote to the UK Government to request an update on their position on the sale of fireworks and was informed that there are no plans to consider legislative change.

[*Martyn Day*]

The position on the use of fireworks is a little more complex; the Fireworks Regulations 2004 cover antisocial use in Scotland, apart from regulation 7, which relates to curfews, which are a devolved matter. Curfews in Scotland are covered in the Fireworks (Scotland) Regulations 2004, which, similar to England, prohibit use between 11 pm and 7 am, with certain exceptions.

Enforcement of curfews primarily is a matter for the police. Excessive noise from fireworks or noise during the curfew period can be considered a statutory nuisance. Local authority environmental health officers have the power to investigate complaints of fireworks noise, but I can think of much better uses of both police and environmental health officers' time than pursuing the inconsiderate use of fireworks. I would much rather they focused on the dangerous use of fireworks, where they are used recklessly and potentially endanger others, although that remains a fairly small minority of fireworks users.

The majority of firework use is, without any doubt, responsible—often by families in private gardens at a reasonably early hour of the evening around bonfire night, or to mark celebrations of family, cultural or religious events. Nobody wishes to remove people's ability to enjoy fireworks, which is why I would prefer fireworks to be restricted to licensed displays and the general public perhaps restricted to purchases of silent fireworks.

The vast bulk of complaints I receive from constituents on this issue relate to noise; in most cases, the noise occurs outwith any curfew period and therefore does not break existing regulations. Something needs to be done, as severe distress is being caused to people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or to those with other mental health issues, and to animals. It is random, unexpected noise that causes many problems. When people know the timings in advance, as is the case with organised displays, it is pretty easy to take precautions, such as putting on some music. My cat, Porridge, quite enjoys it when I put on a bit of soul—not just soul—and I was grateful to hear from the Battersea campaign, which works with the University of Lincoln, that dogs find reggae and classical music most relaxing. I did not know that prior to this debate.

The effect on animals was the biggest area of concern raised by multiple constituents. Many sent me videos and stories of their dogs, cats and horses suffering from severe acoustic stress. I will detail a small but representative sample of concerns raised with my office this year alone. One constituent stated that she has two dogs, one of which is a nine-year-old Rottweiler that is terrified of firework noise. His heart rate increases greatly, he cries continually throughout the bangs and other noises, and is too frightened to go outside. For a period after the noise ceases, he is anxious and extremely clingy. He paces, does not eat or sleep, and is simply not able to relax or settle. My constituent has huge concerns about the effect all that has on the dog's welfare.

Another constituent stated that her little girl woke up in floods of tears due to fireworks going off. Another constituent advised that she could feel the explosion from the fireworks through the floor of her house, and that domestic rubbish bins were targeted. One constituent, who is a registered veterinary nurse, advised of the

animal distress that she had seen due to fireworks. Another constituent stated that she is a teacher and is very concerned about the safety of her students around fireworks. She believes that most teenagers are responsible and caring, but it only takes the action of one reckless person to alter the course of someone's life. The resulting trauma is a drain on NHS resources, and our emergency services are abused when attending unsafe displays that can get out of hand.

Another constituent went even further than the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris). She has two dogs that are so terrified by the noise that she took them away for a week to a cottage in a remote area at a cost of £800, so that her dogs could relax stress free. People should not have to go to those lengths.

Perhaps the most upsetting complaint I received this year was from a woman who advised that she

“had the tragedy of having to put to sleep one of my horses. It was scared by fireworks and ran into a fence causing a terrible wound which he wouldn't be able to recover from.”

Those are just some of the complaints my office received this year.

Most issues could be resolved by limiting noise. After about three weeks of complaints, I raised that in a written question tabled on Monday 5 November, after the heaviest weekend of fireworks. I asked whether the Government had plans to amend the regulations on the sale or use of fireworks to reduce the maximum decibel level of fireworks purchasable by the general public, and to encourage the use of low-noise fireworks. I fared no better than the petitioners or the Scottish Government at getting the answer I was after. I was advised:

“There are already controls on noise levels for fireworks and it is an offence to supply fireworks exceeding 120 decibels to the public. There are no plans to amend the regulations to reduce this level.”

My internet research, which I did for comparison purposes, shows that that is higher than the 100 dB noise of a jet take-off measured at 305 metres, or what I am told is the average human pain threshold of 110 dB.

I ask the Minister seriously to reconsider this issue. It simply will not go away by itself, and doing nothing is not an option. My proposals on organised fireworks displays and the sale of silent fireworks to the general public would solve most of the noise problems, allow pet owners to make suitable arrangements for the times of organised displays, and let police and local authorities concentrate on the genuinely dangerous misuse of fireworks, their unlicensed sale and so on.

5.30 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to say a few words in this debate. The petition is quite stark—it proposes banning the sale of fireworks to the public and limiting displays to licensed venues. There is no doubt that that would mark a significant departure. Wherever one stands in this debate, it is important to recognise that that is potentially quite a draconian step. Parliament should think very carefully before infringing individual liberties excessively.

One cannot take that argument to the extreme—we infringe liberty for perfectly good public policy reasons all the time—but we must recognise that we have to strike a balance between the liberty of the individual and social welfare. It is important to recognise that,

were we to follow through entirely with what the petition proposes, we would in effect outlaw individuals having small fireworks displays in their back garden and so on. It is important also to note that such individuals may not have the money to go to a public display. Be that as it may, there is concern that things have moved on to the extent that that balance is now being looked at slightly differently. Let me give an indication of that.

I suggested on Facebook that I would speak in this debate, and I invited people to engage with me. I was astonished by the level of interaction by people in Cheltenham. They argued on both sides of the debate, but one thing shone out. One person suggested that “firework usage has got completely out of control.”

Someone else indicated that many fireworks were let off in the street, particularly in the town centre, and another person pointed out that they were let off over an extended period. In other words, something appears to have changed in where and the extent to which fireworks are used. That may cause us to look again at the balance we need to strike between individual freedoms and the rights of the wider public.

Let me deal first with the point about where fireworks are let off. As I indicated, someone wrote that they were let off in the town centre. Another person wrote on Facebook:

“In Rowanfield people let off fireworks at all hours of the day and night (several times we had them go off in the middle of the night repeatedly, right above our house). I think there are a few who let the side down but unfortunately it means that I am FOR banning the sale of fireworks to the public. People should be encouraged to go to official events instead.”

Right there we have an individual saying the balance needs to be struck differently. Another person wrote that fireworks had dented the roof of his car. I recognise that those may be the actions of an idiotic few, but there seems to be little doubt that they are growing in number, and that is having a significant impact. The second point, about fireworks being let off over an extended period, has been made already.

The third issue is the impact of fireworks, which other hon. Members touched on. Someone wrote:

“As the owner of four rescue dogs, fireworks are a huge problem.”

We have an animal rescue shelter in Cheltenham, and there are a huge number of rescue dogs in the town.

Another piece of feedback particularly resonated with me. Someone wrote:

“As the wife of a veteran, wholeheartedly support this.”

We must recognise that, increasingly, we have people in our society who may be distressed by fireworks. That ought to be taken into account.

Although I recognise that the Government will have to consider this issue, I also recognise that we need to strike a balance. We should proceed with care. It is not enough—he says, speaking against his own argument—simply to act on the basis of anecdote. If the Government are to act, we have to ensure that there is proper evidence. It is perhaps inevitable that there is more feedback around the firework period. We need a scientific process to establish whether that is simply a spike or a recognised long-term issue—we need an empirically based assessment of whether the problem has got worse.

I invite the Government to look at proceeding incrementally with a calibrated response. They might want to consider whether there are other proportionate measures to address the problem; other hon. Members mentioned some. Should we increase the age at which people can purchase fireworks? It is already 18, but is there a case for increasing it still further? Is there also a case for restricting the use of fireworks—not just their purchase—to certain times of year?

In a free society, we in Parliament should be slow to restrict individual liberties, particularly where there might be an impact on individuals who are not able to attend other fireworks displays, but we should look at the issue none the less. There is a huge number of excellent organised displays in Cheltenham. Other hon. Members mentioned displays in their constituencies. We have Cheltenham Round Table fireworks at the racecourse, which attracts 10,000 people and raises money for the Sue Ryder hospice in Leckhampton and so on. Fairview fireworks party at Cheltenham cricket club raises money for St Vincent’s and St George’s Association. A number of people wrote to say that we should encourage people to attend those displays, so as to put more money in the pockets of local charities that do such invaluable work. That is a powerful argument, which ought to be weighed in the mix.

I invite the Government to recognise that there is a problem, establish its scale on the basis of empirical evidence and consider incremental, proportionate steps to address the problem as they find it to be. If, all those things having been done, there remains a growing issue in our society, the Government will have to look with great care at imposing the kinds of measure set out in the petition. It is certainly my experience that this problem cannot be ignored.

5.37 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. It is good to see this issue being debated again following another public petition—I think this is the third time it has been debated in one form or another. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on the thoughtful way in which she led the debate. I had the privilege of leading the debate on fireworks in January, when I was a member of the Petitions Committee.

One thing that strikes me, as it did in January, is that no Member who has spoken thinks everything is okay and there should be no change. Although people think that slightly different things should be done, absolutely nobody has backed the status quo. I therefore say to the Minister that, wherever we go next, there must be some sort of Government review of this issue. There is great concern about it in our communities and, clearly, among Members from all political parties.

I was intrigued by the start of the speech by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). All of us who spoke in the debate in January declared an undying love for the informal fireworks gatherings of our childhoods, so it was interesting to hear his case. Indeed, we could not have been more 1970s had we come through the door of the Chamber on space hoppers. We heard all about the Catherine wheels, traffic lights, sparklers and rockets, and about the jacket potatoes and soup. Incidentally, we did not always have a guy on the top of our bonfire, although I have seen the burning of the guy.

[Susan Elan Jones]

Those were certainly seen as informal community events. One of the big differences then was that everyone knew when bonfire night was—it happened every year on 5 November. There may have been more such informal displays, but we certainly almost never heard about antisocial behaviour such as arson or attacks on emergency services personnel. That never seemed to happen. It is not surprising that public reaction to this now is different, because I think the nature of the beast at hand is different too.

Many hon. Members today have raised the issue of animal welfare. I am not personally a dog or cat owner, but if I were, I would live in terror, given what it must be like for them every time there is a noise or a bang, or when someone thinks it is funny to have an informal display in the middle of the night. That causes clear distress for animals. I am not surprised that even those who want the most lenient of regulations want a firm commitment on reducing decibel levels. It is not just domestic pets that are affected; in rural areas, it is also livestock. Ten years ago, nobody batted an eyelid if a Chinese lantern went wherever—because it was our inalienable right to send up Chinese lanterns, which seemed to have an inalienable right to burn parts of farms and the like—but then the debate on that changed. In much the same way, what we are seeing with fireworks is a great change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North mentioned North Wales police and antisocial behaviour, and there have been multiple incidents. Often we see fireworks being used not merely in an obstructive, noisy, unpleasant and badly behaved sort of way, but deliberately against firefighters, the police and ambulance staff, as well as members of the general public. It is simply not acceptable. It is sometimes linked to other forms of violence or arson attacks. Clearly, this is not what informal community displays were supposed to be like.

I agree with my hon. Friend that there are clearly issues around enforcement. Our police and firefighters are dealing with many issues that arise from restricted budgets, and the chances are that dealing with people who are being a nuisance with rockets, noise and a bit of fire somewhere is probably not going to come high up the list of priorities.

One of the interesting issues raised when we discussed this last was the international comparisons. Some Members gave interesting examples. I remember hearing about one state in the United States that had extremely liberal gun laws but had banned all fireworks, including the humble sparkler. There may have been a right to bear arms, but there was not a right to bear sparklers. That may be a fairly extreme example, but it is an interesting case. There are many countries with different views on liberties and all the rest of it, but they recognise fireworks for the danger that they can pose.

I urge the Minister to have a proper review of the issue; it really is time for one. Many Members have had letters and emails, and constituents have raised the issue with us. We have seen debates in local and national newspapers and we have seen the strength of feeling with petitions like this one. I cannot remember anyone saying, “It’s great as it is at the moment. We think it’s absolutely fine. We think the law, as it applies to sales, is absolutely fine.” We all know perfectly well that even

though one can make a case that the law as it applies to sales is fairly reasonable, what is not reasonable is that there is no limit whatsoever on the days when fireworks can be used. I know that the Minister will say that there are limits on the times, but then we come back to the issue of enforcement.

I hope that the Minister will take on board all the issues that have been raised in the debate and everything that the petitioners have said, as well as the variation of views. Some people may not agree 100% with the petitioners, but practically everyone wants a change in the law. I really hope that the Government will act.

5.45 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents, including the 595 people from my constituency who signed the petition.

This is becoming a regular debate. I have seen the Minister’s response to the petition and it is hugely disappointing, because my constituents do not have confidence that their concerns are being listened to or that action will be taken on them. My constituents in Glasgow Central are increasingly concerned by the escalation in violence around fireworks. On 5 November, my inbox and my Twitter feed was inundated with videos, pictures and complaints, particularly from people in Pollokshields, who were finding that fireworks were being used as weapons in their community. They are extremely disturbed by that. The Pollokshields community council is having a public meeting tonight, which has had to be moved to a bigger venue, such is the concern in the community. They expect the Government here, which has the responsibility for firework sales, to take action on their concerns, which I will outline further.

Concern is not confined to Pollokshields. Constituents in Govanhill were concerned to see fireworks being let off in the streets, some tied to railings in the middle of the road and let off at cars. People in Bridgeton were concerned by the uprooting of an entire back fence of a community garden to be used on a nearby bonfire, at a cost to the community to replace. These incidents occurred even with the big public display in Glasgow Green nearby. People did not have the excuse of there being nowhere else to go and nothing else to see. The public display was literally at the other end of the street, but people still went ahead and did that.

A resident in Strathbungo, who has been plagued by fireworks as well, points out that it is illogical and bizarre that people are allowed to go out in this country and buy explosives for their own use. That really ought to change.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Is the hon. Lady as concerned as I am about fireworks being used against firefighters? She has given examples of fireworks being used against members of the public, but in my constituency on bonfire night, firefighters in Sunderland were ambushed by a gang of youths in one of the communities, who had set fire to a car with fireworks. They had put the car over the bonfire and the car was alight. They then used other cars—what they call criminal pool cars—to block the estate, so the firefighters were trapped. The only reason the firefighters got out was because one of them had

experience from the Meadow Well riots. Is the hon. Lady as concerned as I am that we are selling explosives that are used against firefighters as well as the public?

**Alison Thewliss:** The experience that the hon. Lady describes is absolutely terrifying. No community should have to put up with that. The firefighters and emergency services staff should not be put at risk when they are trying to go out and help the public.

I want to mention the impact on my local police in Glasgow. The police were prepared. They went out and visited the offenders from last year and they visited shops and did test purchasing. They did what was within their power to do. Under current law, they are not able to seize fireworks, if people have them, so even if they found them, they would not be able to take them away. They were taken aback, particularly by the aggression towards the police on the night. Fireworks were being quite deliberately fired at local police officers. It was by good luck, more than anything else, that nobody was injured. Local residents were calling the police from their flats, saying that this was happening. When the police turned up there were 30 to 40 youths and young adults—not just kids, but adults as well—firing industrial scale fireworks, not small bangers, along the streets, at flats, up closes, in buildings, and towards and underneath cars. It was really quite frightening.

I will send the Minister some of the footage, which is on Twitter. Some additional footage that the police have shown me is absolutely terrifying. It was more by good luck than anything else that no one was more seriously injured. I understand that in another incident in Glasgow a three-year-old girl was injured by a firework. It is only a matter of time before things get worse. The police knew what was going to happen, as I have said. They supplemented their policing resources with a national policing resource; they had something akin to a riot van when they came to police the community. Even then they were forced to withdraw. The situation was so dangerous that they could barely put their officers out there. If it is that scary for the police, how terrifying it must be for residents, who feel that nothing can be done. The Minister must do something about it.

The hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) mentioned PTSD and service personnel. Many of my constituents have come here from other countries—literally from war zones. It must cause fear to people who have fled violence and explosions when they hear such things replayed nightly over many weeks. It is quite significant.

I want to quote some of my constituents, who do not feel their voices have been listened to. In a comment that chimes with what the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) said about his experience with his dog, one constituent said:

“As I write this email, I am sitting in my tiny internal bathroom for the third night in a row with my extremely distressed dog. I expect to be sitting here each night for at least another week. I’ve had to do this for the past 9 years.”

It is entirely unreasonable that people should have to live their lives in that way. Another constituent wrote:

“This is the third year we have lived in this area and the third year our children have been terrified of the noise and the feeling of relentless bombardment throughout the night on fireworks night. My daughter was in tears...as were many of her school friends as they were woken up dozens of times by the loud banging, racing cars and arguing voices. Our friend had a live firework thrown at his two year old in a buggy as he picked up his

daughter from after school care...It is only a matter of time before one of our young people is seriously hurt...So much is written about dogs and pets being terrified at this time of year but what about our children?”

The impact can be quite traumatic, and children’s education can be affected by nights of disturbed sleep, distress and worry. From my family’s background in education, I am aware that fireworks are sometimes used in school; young people let them off in the corridors, so clearly they are able to get their hands on them.

[MR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Another constituent wrote:

“The explosions were continuous from before 6pm until after 10 pm, with intermittent before and after that...The most terrifying was on our street. We live on Kenmure street and there were gangs congregating on the corner with Albert drive. The police tried but couldn’t keep on top of it. They let fireworks off in the street, on the pavement, horizontally, under cars and amidst people. I don’t know how more people weren’t seriously injured.”

A resident of a neighbouring street said:

“Those of us living in Herriet St Pollokshields had 30-40 men, many wearing balaclavas, setting off industrial sized fireworks in the middle of the street.”

That was a terrifying experience for my constituents, as may be imagined.

There was also a need for a clear-up afterwards. There were boxes of abandoned fireworks to be picked up, some of them dud and some not—who knows? They were littered all over the place, and I picked some up in a park last week as well. They had just been left behind. During our debate in January, I mentioned sparklers being left behind in Glasgow Green, causing damage to people’s dogs. They could not walk or play in the grass because people had left metal sparklers all over the place. I tweeted about that earlier, and someone pointed out that the red blaes pitch at the Glasgow Gaelic School in Finnieston has been left pretty much unusable by the community and school, because of the mess left behind after the fireworks. There is a cost to local government in clearing up all those things, which may take weeks.

We need to look at better licensing of events. At the moment there is a free for all, and that is not working for our constituents. There should be some kind of audit trail for wholesalers that sell industrial-sized fireworks. If they sell industrial-grade fireworks, for want of a better term, what happens to those afterwards? How do we ensure that they can be traced? If they turn up on the corner of a street on Pollokshields, how can we know where they came from? We also need to think about criminal offences in connection with agent purchase. Many fireworks fall into the hands of young people. They are clearly bought for them by adults—friends or family members; then the young people are sent off into the street with them. The criminal offences should be similar to those relating to agent purchase of alcohol. The law should allow for local byelaws. If, as in my constituency, there are areas with a particular problem, byelaws could be tighter than the overall law in preventing the sale or use of fireworks.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) talked about the frustrations of his constituents, and I share his concerns. The Minister has heard concerns from across the House, and should take them on board. One of my constituents said:

[Alison Thewliss]

“Every year, I sign one or more petitions asking Parliament to ban the private use of fireworks, limit the public use of fireworks and/or mandate the use of so-called silent fireworks. Every year, the government responds with a bland platitude about fireworks being regulated and there being no plans for change. Every year, I hear and see those regulations being flouted, for example: fireworks being set off in public parks by private individuals ...youngsters...throwing them at fire service personnel, and even fireworks being set off in the street”.

The Minister cannot hide or duck the issue. There is a problem here. The Scottish Government have taken on a review, and I welcome that. The Minister will know that the signatories to the petition come largely from Scottish constituencies. They want something to happen, because in Scotland the law does not allow us to do much more than we have done already. I urge the Minister either to deal with the issue or devolve powers to the Scottish Parliament and let the Scottish Government get on with it.

5.56 pm

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones); her speech covered so much that we do not need to say much at all, so I shall try to keep my remarks brief.

The current regulations effectively cover five areas: restrictions on the periods of the year when fireworks can be used; restrictions on the times of day when they can be let off; the definition of a public place where they may be let off; categories of fireworks available for purchase by the public; and restrictions on the age below which an individual is not allowed to possess a firework in a public place. It is my contention that apart from the fourth of those—we banned bangers and jumping jacks—we have not done very well on the other regulations. I welcome the Minister to her place and hope that she has the measure of what the debate is about. She is a fair person, and I know she will be thinking hard about what she is going to say.

In the major debate on the previous e-petition, on 29 January, the then Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), argued:

“Even in this debate, in which the same concerns have been raised consistently in almost every speech, there has been a difference of opinion about how we should tackle the issue. Some advocate an outright ban, some want a consultation and some want tighter legislation. It is for the Government to consider all those arguments in the round, form an opinion and ensure that the legislation meets those challenges.”—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 259WH.]

I take that as reasonably optimistic. The trouble is that nothing has really happened since the beginning of the year, and we are now at the end of it, so I hope the Minister can make some more positive noises.

None of us, I think, has argued for an outright ban; but we are of one mind that the restrictions are not working, and that they must be revisited. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) has left the Chamber, I shall give my pet story, because everyone else has. I have a cat called Scamp, a waif and stray who just arrived one day, so I looked after him. Two things completely faze him. One is the sight of a black plastic bag. It horrifies me to think

what someone did to him. The second is fireworks. He disappears through the catflap as quickly as you could see a cat disappear, and we will not see him for two or three hours. He is petrified. Something and someone somewhere have done things to him that we just have to clear from the mind. That is an animal story, but so much of this is about animals, because they are our nearest and dearest and we must take notice of how they are affected. Funnily enough, I met the National Farmers Union today, and said, “What’s the NFU’s view on this?”, to which the NFU, as always, said, “We haven’t got an official view, but if you want to know my personal view, it’s terrifying for many animals.”

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): Unfortunately, due to the Prime Minister’s statement I could not be here at the beginning of the debate, so somebody may already have raised the plight of horses, but as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the horse I will say for the record that already this year there have been 42 firework-related incidents that have affected horses, resulting in two being killed and 20 injured. I particularly wanted to speak in this debate because what is missing in that statistic is, for example, what happened in my constituency over the period of bonfire night, where two mares aborted their foals. Sadly, they will not appear in the statistics because they are unborn. I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to look at tightening the regulations to try to make the animals safe.

**Dr Drew:** I totally agree with the right hon. Lady. When I say wildlife, I mean livestock, but we are talking about wildlife as well, because of course it is also affected.

Although the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) talked about the issues surrounding a total ban and although a ban was intimated in the petition, in the speeches so far no one has argued for that. We are just arguing for tighter regulation and an increasing emphasis on official firework displays, rather than what is happening, with people still letting off fireworks at the wrong time, in the wrong place and often gratuitously, ignoring the impact on other people.

In terms of the five questions about how we regulate, doing so at the point of sale is clearly not working, because too many people obtain fireworks for the wrong purposes and misuse them. We will have to look at that. We have the 2003 Act, which has been mentioned; that was updated by the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015, to which the Minister will no doubt also refer. We have heard in great detail about the number of accidents and some of the real problems with fires, arson attacks and deliberate violence against people and property. I am told by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals that 45% of dogs in the UK are fearful when they hear fireworks—I am not sure who has asked them, but from their response we can be pretty sure that they are suffering.

We must find a way of working around the traditional festivals, but, as a number of hon. Members have said, 5 November is a date. It is not a week or a whole series of events. There are official firework displays, but we can accommodate them, because we can tell people and warn them when they are going to take place. Outside those important dates, there should be no use of fireworks.

I am afraid we are moving toward people not having private use of fireworks, just because if they choose to act irresponsibly they are damaging things for everyone else. We are also talking about bringing decibel levels down, certainly below 120 dB. Some say it should be well below the human pain threshold, which I gather is 97 dB. That also needs to be considered.

Referring to the impact on pets and other animals, which is what most of us are talking about, there is unanimity now among the animal welfare charities that they want more action. They feel that whatever is in place is not working satisfactorily. Whether that is Dogs Trust, the RSPCA or Cats Protection, they are all of one mind and have one stated aim: to have the Government look at how they can at least enforce the regulations better and, dare I say, revisit those particular regulations.

I hope the Minister will say something about what she intends to do, because it is important we hear that today. Otherwise, another year has slipped by with apparently no action. We all know that we get regular complaints about this issue, and if we are not seen to be doing anything about it, people will think that we are not really that effective—so for all our sakes, I hope the Minister will make us more effective.

6.4 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth.

I have been contacted by a large number of constituents about the private use of fireworks and the effects it can have on animals, public safety and noise nuisance levels in our community. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), I think when we get to speak at this point in the debate we are in great danger of repeating what other people have said. I just hope that repetition in this case will make the argument stronger.

One constituent who contacted me highlighted her utter disgust at stories of fireworks being thrown at vulnerable people, aimed at the emergency services and used to harm, torture and maim wildlife, pets and farm animals. She outlined her ardent belief that,

“people used to respect fireworks and the damage they could do and it was very rare for them to be used as weapons or to create terror in people.”

But she felt times had changed significantly and that,

“there are now more members of the public that don’t care about how their actions affect others.”

That was a common theme among the people who contacted me, as was their concern that fireworks had got louder as the appetite for bigger, louder and more shocking bangs had grown. They said that that not only created significant noise nuisance in their communities, but caused distress to the elderly and many other vulnerable people, to pets and pet owners, and of course to wildlife. They felt it was a problem that had got out of control and that the use of fireworks had stretched further and further beyond the traditional dates. One constituent said,

“It starts from October and will go on and on and on until January.”

There was near-unanimity among all those who contacted me that the private use of fireworks should be restricted to certain times during the year, such as 5 November, new year’s eve, Diwali and Chinese new year. They believed that restricting the use of fireworks to those

traditional dates would mitigate the negative impact that fireworks can have on our communities and allow pet owners time to prepare and take the necessary steps to safeguard their animals’ health and wellbeing.

None of the people who contacted me are killjoys. They do not want fireworks banned altogether. They simply want restrictions on private use and for people to be encouraged to go to safe and properly organised fireworks displays on designated dates.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): Of the 794 constituents who signed the petition in East Lothian, there is almost universal agreement among pet owners that, if they are aware of the days it is going to happen, they can take steps to protect their pets. It is the use of fireworks outwith those dates that causes so much fear and distress and so many problems for the families. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Colleen Fletcher:** Of course; as I have said, that was one of the points that was made time and again. People sit in their houses on 5 November and other significant dates and expect to hear fireworks, but when it is out of sync, a loud bang can make me jump, let alone pets and vulnerable people. I have no personal stories about pets, I am afraid, so I will stop there, but I hope the Minister will respond to the points raised by my constituents.

6.9 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): May I express my pleasure at serving under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth? I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing the debate and on the comprehensive way in which she outlined the issues that have generated this petition and the public support for it.

I was sitting slightly uncomfortably when the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) described the idiots who let off fireworks in the street. I am actually a native of Cheltenham, and in my youth I let off fireworks in Cheltenham’s streets, which I am incredibly embarrassed about. However, that was my generation, in common with the situation outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North, although my generation is actually a little earlier than hers.

There are certain things that I put forward in mitigation. First, those fireworks were not as powerful, noisy or dangerous as now, although they were still quite capable of causing disruption and damaging people. Secondly, if my parents, or their neighbours, had found out, certain vigorous sanctions would have been applied to me. I am not sure whether there is still that powerful social pressure on curbing antisocial behaviour in the way that there was then. There is a range of reasons for that, but it is not really within the remit of the debate to go into them all.

However, things have undoubtedly changed. First, in the monocultural society that I grew up in, we had fireworks only on 5 November, or, if someone was a bit naughty, they would let some off before. Generally speaking, however, there would be only a week or so of firework activity. It is totally different now, because we live in a multicultural society, which I am very glad about. Many ethnic groups and religions have their own celebrations, some of which they like to enhance with

[Mr Adrian Bailey]

the use of fireworks. I welcome that; we cannot confine this particular pleasure to one ethnic group in our society. Secondly, it has become more and more popular to use fireworks during other events—birthdays and other celebrations as well. The potential range of dates and the opportunity to buy fireworks, notwithstanding our legislation, are that much greater, with the potential disruption therefore equally greater.

I was around in the House during debates on fireworks legislation that took place in various steps between 2003 and 2005. I remember that the situation was getting absolutely intolerable at that time; fireworks seemed to go on for about six weeks, at all times of day and so on and so forth. That gave the impetus for that private Member's Bill—and the last Labour Government's backing of it—which brought in many of the restrictions that we now have. I have to say that, after those restrictions were brought in, there was undoubtedly a substantial diminution in the nuisance caused by fireworks.

However, things have been getting worse, which I put down to, essentially, cuts to our public services and to those agencies responsible for ensuring that our laws are properly exercised. On 19 October, I went out on patrol with officers from West Midlands police, who said that we were just entering into “nuisance fortnight”, which covers Hallowe'en and 5 November and for which all their leave was cancelled, demonstrating the impact that that period has on a key public service.

Of course, if the police are concentrating on dealing with the antisocial use of fireworks, they cannot concentrate on other aspects as well. For other services, such as the ambulance service, the NHS and the fire service, the same applies. The cuts to our public services mean that the control that might have been possible a few years ago cannot be exercised.

I do not think I have ever known a fixed penalty notice to be served on somebody who has used fireworks in an antisocial way. I do not know whether there are statistics that demonstrate that they are served on those people, but I certainly think it is fair to say that, whatever the regulations, in the culture and climate out there it is believed that no action will be taken against someone who uses fireworks antisocially.

There are many examples of people using fireworks antisocially in the Black country and Birmingham, but two are most conspicuous. Last year in Birmingham, one man died of burns when four people threw an industrial firework into his house, which set the house alight. This year in Smethwick, in an adjoining constituency to mine, a firework was thrown into a crowded pub. Happily there were no serious injuries, but the pub itself was severely damaged by the fire that ensued.

It is not really surprising that none of the perpetrators of those particular actions have been arrested or anything. With the cuts to West Midlands police—more than 2,000 officers have been cut over the last six or seven years—and the way the force is stretched, it has other things to concentrate on. None the less, that sort of crime is as devastating to those on the wrong end of it as any other sort of crime.

Many Members have talked about animals. On my life's journey, I have been a dog owner. I love animals. I am concerned that—I assume because of cuts—the

regulations on the number of decibels allowable for fireworks are not being enforced. Up until a year or two ago, it was quite normal for tests to be carried out on fireworks, and a heck of a lot were found to make noise of over 120 dB. That testing has stopped, and the only reasonable interpretation for why is that there is neither the funding nor the people to do it. That is really serious for animals. We talk about noise and animals, but we forget that animals, for the most part, have far more sensitive hearing than us, and if a noise disturbs us, the corresponding impact on animals will be devastating.

While there is a good case for looking at our laws, particularly on time of use—fireworks can be bought only at a particular time but can be let off three months later; storing fireworks presents another issue—the restrictions in respect of allowing them to be used only on private land are not being enforced at all. Fireworks are let off on public highways and so on.

We must invest more money in the enforcement of existing regulations. There is no point in introducing new regulations if they are not backed up. Above all, we need to take a long, hard look at restrictions on the usage of fireworks—where they may be used and at what time—allied with investment in the services that actually take action against those who breach the regulations.

6.19 pm

**John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure as always to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth, particularly in this important debate. I sincerely congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing the debate and on her in-depth understanding, knowledge and informative contribution. I do not know whether I can add much to the speeches already made, and particularly to the hon. Lady's, but my contribution to the discussion will centre on both the impact that bonfire night has on animal welfare and how our emergency service professionals respond to the consequences of unauthorised fireworks being set off before, during and after 5 November.

These problems occur despite the fact that every year in Scotland the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals puts out clear warnings on how these explosives can cause misery for pets and their owners. Irresponsible individuals continue to engage in this behaviour year after year. The petition has received about 300,000 signatures, of which some 930 were from my Falkirk constituency. That is a declaration, if ever there was one, of people's concern for animal welfare.

As all of us here know, creatures domestic and wild have heightened senses; that has already been mentioned. Their hearing is far better than ours, and they cannot rationalise as harmless fun the explosive bangs and crashes that they hear. To them, a rocket going off is deafening and terrifying; it means imminent danger. Fireworks can literally scare animals to death. The explosions trigger blind panic and can result in animals running into the path of traffic. Instances have been recorded of wild birds, including swans, flying into pylons to their injury and death—a horrific thought.

Horses and cattle have charged in terror straight into barbed wire and through fences, badly injuring themselves. That causes great stress to farmers, who look after their livestock with great care. It is also their livelihood, and I

am all too aware from the farmers I know personally how much they worry about the impact that fireworks can have. The preparations that farmers make to protect their animals should very much be taken into account when the Government consider whether to change the existing laws.

My research shows that most vets are in favour of tighter restrictions on fireworks, because of the sheer volume of animals that they have to treat for firework-related injuries, as well as the severe stress experienced in the lead-up to bonfire season. Many pet owners spend money on medication for their animals in an attempt to keep them calm, or they remove them from their own area to a safe area. Constituents have told me that their whole family become distressed at this time of year.

One lady I know very well says that her family dog, Ruby, was recently scared into a panic by fireworks being let off at 10 pm a week before the official bonfire night. Her pet became so scared that it was drooling and panting for breath and her children had to cover it with a blanket and comfort it until it calmed down. Other hon. Members have told similar stories. Even the next day, the animal was shaking when they took it outside. That random setting off of rockets left everyone in the family on edge until a week after bonfire night, when it all faded away and stopped. That is totally unnecessary stress as far as I can see, and something needs to be done immediately.

I am sure that, in calling for action, pet owners and farmers would be joined by the parents of babies and small children. I have experienced the problem with my own family. When my daughter was about two years old, she was absolutely terrified and I had to take her away from a display and back to the car. It took her a long while to calm down, and I would never like any other child or parent to go through that experience. There is a call for action to be taken, and it has to be taken now.

Then there is the impact on our fire and rescue services. They are under immense pressure during this period. As you know, Mr Howarth, a very strong message is going out across communities that people should attend organised firework displays. That message, particularly from our police, fire and rescue services, needs to be listened to by the decision makers in this place. Those who see the consequences of illegal, irresponsible bonfire and firework events know that legislators sometimes fail them—in this case, by not lowering the noise levels of fireworks. That sends the wrong message, the wrong signals, to emergency responders, including fire services, and in general to our communities. As has been said, the people who do these things think that they will get away with it. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) talked about the things going on in Glasgow, which are absolutely horrific. Members of public services are diverted from, for example, road traffic accidents—their normal response duties.

Even lowering the decibel level of fireworks would be a step in the right direction and would clearly demonstrate that the Government were listening to our constituents. Another step would be to move to licensed-only events, such as the one in Falkirk, my own constituency, where we have a free event at Callendar Park that is attended by thousands of people. Sometimes we have great artists

there; we make it an event for everyone to come to, and it is a wonderful success. I have to thank the local radio station, Central FM, which allowed me personally to broadcast to ask people to attend the event—I do not know whether that had any effect, but it was very busy.

Our emergency services, from ambulances to hospitals, are all under more pressure than necessary at this time of year because of things such as burns and scalds. I believe that the noise of fireworks distracts parents, diverting their attention from their children, and of course we all know the consequences from sparklers—scalding, and clothes and hair being set on fire.

To conclude, the regulations on the noise level of fireworks should be changed. The loudness of the bangs is unnecessary, and avoidable at the manufacturing stage. In addition, only licensed events should be able to use fireworks. I hope that the Minister is listening and we do not get a damp squib in response.

6.25 pm

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): My hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) and for Stroud (Dr Drew) said that they thought that we were all going to say more or less the same thing in this debate. I can confirm, as the last speaker before the winding-up speeches, that we are indeed all going to say the same thing—but I will say it briefly. I would like to repeat, on behalf of the 905 constituents of Newport East who signed the petition that has brought us here today, all the calls to restrict the sale of fireworks. Newport East had the seventh highest number of petitioners of any constituency in the UK and the highest number in Wales, and I would very much like to give voice to their concerns today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), in her excellent opening remarks, talked about the rosy glow of firework nights in times past. I take part in this debate with a bit of a heavy heart, because my late and wonderful dad very much disliked and railed against what he called organised fun and insisted that absolutely every year on 5 November we had a firework display in the back garden, rather than going to a public display. With that background, I certainly do not want to deny families that fun and time of celebration, but the problem, as everyone has said in the debate, is that the days of a small tin of fireworks in the back garden, let off at 8 o'clock on bonfire night, are gone. They are not completely gone, but they have been overtaken. The firework season was once a few days but now seems to run on a prolonged loop from October all the way to January. In addition, fireworks are bigger, louder and more powerful and sold not just in supermarkets but in the endless pop-up shops that appear and disappear on our high streets at the drop of a hat. People can get big and very powerful fireworks from overseas on the internet. The scale of what happens and the availability of fireworks are very different now.

The problem exists in the build-up and aftermath, from Halloween through bonfire night and all the way to the new year; and particularly this year around bonfire night, I, like other hon. Members, received a host of emails and messages from constituents complaining about the distress that fireworks can cause to vulnerable loved ones, pets and other animals—livestock has been mentioned. Many of the complaints related to antisocial

[Jessica Morden]

behaviour, and I think it is true to say that the firework season has become an excuse for a destructive minority to cause misery for the public at large.

I would therefore like to praise the partnership work between Gwent police, the fire service and other organisations, such as Newport Live. One example is Operation BANG—Be A Nice Guy. Its aim is to reduce antisocial behaviour, particularly around Halloween and bonfire night. I praise Newport Live for the diversionary activity that it puts in place every year for young people in our communities in Newport.

Despite that, one constituent this year told me that he had come home from work early, at 2 pm, on the day of bonfire night to find teenagers in his back garden throwing fireworks at the house, deliberately aiming to frighten his two young children. Another resident, an on-call carer, described fireworks being thrown at her as she walked down the street, and witnessing a mother run down a nearby road with a toddler as fireworks were thrown at her and her child. Similarly, a former NHS worker wrote to me to describe the firework-inflicted burns he regularly dealt with in A&E on bonfire night. One local family lived through this when their four-year-old daughter was hit in the neck by a firework at a private display last year.

I have a hamster and although I do not have a hamster-related fireworks story, I have received many complaints about the impact on pets. Many constituents told me that their pets were completely traumatised and will not go outside. One dog-owner described his beloved pet spending most of bonfire night

“quivering in a corner and panting so vigorously I thought he would have a heart attack.”

Another constituent told me how his dog injured his teeth and claws while trying to dig and gnaw through a wall, in response to loud bangs from the street outside.

I also pay tribute to the emergency services for their work on bonfire night, including the fire service, police and health workers, who experience one of the busiest nights of the year and do all that they can with stretched resources. It is important to emphasise, as other hon. Members have, that Gwent police, for instance, has seen its budget cut by 40% since 2010. The story is similar across the country. It is really difficult for police forces and local authorities, which do the licensing, to tackle this growing problem when they are already so stretched. We need to do more to address that.

I also agree with all the well-made points about noise pollution and pollution generally. Like other hon. Members, I attended the recent drop-in event in Parliament, where a number of charities including Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, British Veterinary Association, Cats Protection and others put forward the case for a review of existing fireworks legislation. That was with a view to introducing further much-needed restrictions on their use, particularly outside organised public displays. The RSPCA has also voiced its support for a restriction on the private use of fireworks to certain traditional dates, such as 5 November, new year's eve, Chinese new year and Diwali, and a reduction in the maximum noise level to 97 dB, which is proven to cause less distress to animals. Its call for tougher licensing for public and private displays is something for the Government to consider, and I think that is a sensible and proportionate approach.

I absolutely agree with those charities and my constituents that something needs to change if we are to help limit the distress caused by fireworks to vulnerable people and animals. Progress has been made since the Fireworks Regulations 2004, which restricted sales, but further action is needed. Finally, I hope the Government will reflect on the contributions to this debate and consider undertaking a review of firework displays. I very much support the e-petition on behalf of the 905 people in my constituency who signed it.

6.32 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this debate on the e-petition calling for a change in the law to include a ban on the public use of fireworks. I thank the Petitions Committee for bringing this debate forward and the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for setting out a comprehensive case, outlining the concerns we have all heard from our constituents.

I do not think that any hon. Member has argued against the fact that, when used correctly, fireworks are an enjoyable spectacle. They are enjoyed by some 10 million people across the UK each year, and, as was mentioned several times, they have become a feature of publicly organised events in November, weddings and all sorts of other celebrations throughout the year. Anyone fortunate enough to have attended a publicly organised firework display will no doubt have enjoyed it immensely, and no one here would want to interfere with that.

However, we also need to take account of the alarm, distress, danger and anxiety that fireworks far too often cause to too many people and animals, and the disruption that they can cause to communities when purchased and used irresponsibly by individuals, which we heard about from the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), who is a former fire officer, as well as many other hon. Members.

We heard from the hon. Members for Warrington North and for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock some of the statistics around accidents and injuries caused by fireworks. We are all aware of the increased pressure that problems associated with fireworks bring to bear on our public services, which are already stressed, which we heard about from the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally).

Every year from October to January, I receive complaints, as I am sure we all do, from constituents whose neighbourhoods are disrupted and plagued by the irresponsible use of fireworks at all hours of the dark evenings, as was outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day). Under cover of darkness, too many people set out to cause mischief, thinking that it is funny to set off fireworks near housing, where children or whole families are shocked from their slumbers; pets, such as cats and dogs, are scared half to death; and elderly people are driven into a state of fear and alarm. The effect on horses is also an issue to be considered, as we have heard. The hon. Member for Warrington North clearly set out the effect on veterans, who might be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder following active service.

We last debated this issue in January, as the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) reminded us. We were told then by the responding Minister that the creation

of the Office for Product Safety and Standards would address many of the concerns raised about fireworks at that time, which were similar to the concerns raised today. This new body, we were told, would receive some £12 million a year in central Government funding to ensure that there was access to information nationally and to support local authorities in their work.

The new body, we were told, would work with key stakeholders and enforcing authorities to review the guidance materials available on the safe and responsible use of fireworks. It would provide an intelligence-handling function to improve the information we had and would also examine the individual safety of particular fireworks and of other products on sale—or so we were told.

I hope the Minister can update us on the work of the Office for Product Safety and Standards on the issue of fireworks. If the Office for Product Safety and Standards has not yet addressed the issue of fireworks, perhaps she will explain what has caused the delay, given the widespread concern about the effects of fireworks on our communities.

The Scottish Parliament, through the Fireworks (Scotland) Regulations 2004, restricted when fireworks can be set off, but as we all know all too well, irresponsible people who want to set off fireworks do not care a jot about the time restrictions. They do not care whether it is legal to set off a firework at certain times of day or night, and it seems that such irresponsible people do not care a jot about safety either.

I have been contacted by constituents in a state of great distress, as I am sure we all have, after a particularly alarming and noisy night of fireworks, which can happen for no apparent reason other than the fact that it is October, November or December, or it is Tuesday, or people have fireworks left over.

Fireworks are also still available for sale, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) pointed out. On such occasions, as we have heard from several Members today—we have all heard this—constituents tell us that the onslaught of fireworks has had a profound effect on not only their quality of life, but their pets, which undergo trembling fits and become withdrawn and very frightened. That cannot be prepared for, as it comes out of nowhere whenever someone has fireworks and thinks that they will have a bit of fun. Some people think it is a great idea to set fireworks off in the middle of the night, up tenement entrances or in the shared entryways to flats.

The sale of fireworks is strongly restricted in the Republic of Ireland. The maximum punishment for possessing fireworks without a licence or for lighting fireworks in a public place is a €10,000 fine and a five-year prison sentence. In Northern Ireland, fireworks have long been subjected to some of the strictest laws in the world. Perhaps the Minister will tell us why the rest of the UK is denied similar or greater protection. As we heard from the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones), even in the United States, which has liberal gun laws, some states believe that restrictions on fireworks should be strict.

The situation in Scotland is nothing short of bizarre: the use of fireworks is a devolved matter, but the sale of fireworks is reserved. It does not take a genius to work out that unless we tackle in some way the sale of fireworks and who can get their hands on

them, we have lost any meaningful influence over who uses them, which makes that extremely difficult to police.

At a local level, environmental health and antisocial behaviour teams can and do work hard to tackle the misuse of fireworks in our communities, but that seems to deal with the consequences of the wide availability of fireworks, rather than tackling the fear, alarm, distress, fire risks and safety hazards that fireworks cause. We need to tackle the real issue of the sale of fireworks to individuals; we need to tackle the problem at source. The hon. Member for West Bromwich West reminded us that fireworks are far more powerful and prevalent than they were in the past.

The time restrictions on fireworks are regulated by law, so fireworks cannot be set off between 11 pm and 7 am, with a few exceptions for special occasions such as the new year and so on. Clearly, however, from what we have heard, that does not go far enough. An individual who wishes to buy fireworks to cause fear and alarm, to have a bit of fun because they find it entertaining to cause destruction to their neighbourhood, or to use them as weapons of choice will set off fireworks whenever and wherever they choose. Restrictions on when fireworks can be set off afford no comfort to the communities plagued by them. As we have heard from several hon. Members, the regulations cannot be enforced. Once fireworks are on sale to any individual over 18, all control is lost over irresponsible behaviour, which is sadly all too common in some of our neighbourhoods.

The Scottish Government have launched a welcome consultation on the use of fireworks, but the nub of the issue is their sale, which is reserved to this Parliament and which cannot continue to be dodged or ignored. We need action and a serious and meaningful UK-wide review of who can buy fireworks. We cannot have any more shilly-shallying. I am keen to see the results of the Scottish Government's consultation and I believe that the UK should follow suit as a first step—I hope the Minister has been listening.

Fireworks cannot currently be sold to anyone under 18, but so what? We know that children can get hold of them. We also know that those using fireworks irresponsibly are often perfectly entitled to buy them under the law as it stands. The irresponsible use of fireworks is not confined to those who get hold of them illegally. That is why more needs to be done to protect communities, the elderly, pets and a range of people in our communities, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk and other hon. Members who have been contacted repeatedly over the years by constituents whose lives are made a misery for several months of the year.

As the hon. Members for Stroud and for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) set out, the current situation is not working and is not sustainable for the health, wellbeing and safety of our neighbourhoods. We can all look back nostalgically, as the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) did, to bonfire nights when we were growing up, but I am sure she agrees that that cuts no ice with communities that must regularly tolerate the awfulness of fireworks misuse for several months of the year.

We can all agree that the problem appears to be growing, as the hon. Members for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) and for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) pointed out. The only solution is to tackle it at source and

[Patricia Gibson]

review who should be sold fireworks. Personally, I am attracted to limiting their use to licensed organised public displays that are well advertised in advance and that take place within a publicised timespan, but I am also open to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Organised licensed displays allow the many people who wish to enjoy fireworks to do so safely. Importantly, they also allow local residents to plan ahead and make arrangements to protect their pets, as the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) pointed out. The Dogs Trust says that where public displays are organised, 93% of pet owners—a high figure—alter their plans during the display time to minimise their pet's trauma, which protects their pet's welfare.

As for helping pet owners to prepare for the use of fireworks in their neighbourhoods, from what we have heard today, we know that that is often not possible, because fireworks go off randomly, with no warning. We can all agree—I hope I can include the Minister in that—that the answer is greater restrictions on the sale of fireworks, instead of selling them to all and sundry over 18 years old. Organised public fireworks displays, which are a much safer option for all our communities, would then gradually become the accepted norm.

It is time to ban the free sale of fireworks except for public licensed displays, but hon. Members do not have to take my word for it. Let us consult across the UK and see what the public think, as has already been done in Scotland—there is no reason that cannot be done across the UK. A ban would mean that we could still enjoy fireworks in our communities at new year and at celebrations such as weddings, but that they would be out of the hands of those who, by accident or design, put the fear of God into our communities, shake our children and whole families awake in their beds, alarm older people, cause real suffering to our pets and even cause injury.

We need to let the public have their say through a widespread consultation. We need to get the balance right. No one is asking for fireworks to be banned altogether, but I urge the Minister to consider a consultation similar to the one being carried out in Scotland. Let us hear what the public think—they need to be part of the conversation—so they can inform how we proceed to improve the situation across the UK, and let us see a meaningful response to their concerns. I hope the Minister will set out how she will proceed on that basis.

6.46 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mr Howarth. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on securing this important and popular debate. The strength of feeling on the matter is undeniable and the fact that more than 290,000 people and counting have signed the petition is a testament to that.

Fireworks can cause stress and anxiety in small children, older people and those who suffer from mental health issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) described how pets and livestock are particularly affected, as for them, fireworks come unannounced, which can leave them feeling extremely vulnerable. Dogs feel safe and secure when they know what to expect, so the unannounced nature of fireworks

is particularly distressing. Dog owners regularly complain that they face a waiting game when it comes to loud noises and scared pets, as eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris). Similarly, cats associate loud noises with danger and can retreat for days at the sound of fireworks.

However, I am conscious that most people use fireworks responsibly in line with the regulations. There is no doubt that a fabulous fireworks display is the central feature of many cultural and religious celebrations, such as Diwali, Chinese new year and new year's eve.

As hon. Members have noted, the legislation on fireworks is 13 years old. Strict rules about the quality, quantity and sale of fireworks are covered in the Fireworks Regulations 2004, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) believes need revisiting. Since January 2005, the sale of fireworks to the public has been prohibited except by licensed traders. However, fireworks can be sold by unlicensed traders for Chinese new year, for Diwali, between 15 October and 10 November for bonfire night celebrations, and for new year celebrations. That is welcome, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey), who also made a refreshing confession about his boyhood misdemeanours in Cheltenham on bonfire night.

The period around bonfire night is rather long, and in the last debate on the topic I asked the then Minister whether the Government would consult on it. Can the Minister update the Chamber on whether a consultation has taken or will be taking place? The 2004 regulations are fairly strict on timings, dates and who can use fireworks, so a large body of regulation covers the matter, but having sufficient regulation and enforcing it properly are two wholly separate issues.

I now turn to the lack of enforcement. The savage cuts faced by our local authorities' trading standards bodies, which are responsible for enforcing consumer protection laws, are seriously concerning. For example, there was a 56% reduction in the number of staff at trading standards bodies between 2009-10 and 2016. The Government have failed to address this matter properly, and although the newly established Office for Product Safety and Standards is a step forward, the scope of resources available to it does not go far enough to ensure a sufficient level of enforcement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) highlighted the fact that if the regulations are not enforced properly, as they should be, we see a rise in the number of police having to step in when fireworks get into the wrong hands or are used inappropriately, so it is not surprising that our police forces are frustrated by the issue of fireworks. Animal welfare charities, such as Battersea Dogs & Cats Home and the Kennel Club, agree that poor enforcement is having a detrimental effect on animal welfare.

The other matter, of course, is the UK's departure from the EU. The Prime Minister's botched Brexit deal offers nothing to secure the future of our world-class consumer protections and the Minister has failed to outline clearly what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that enforcement is maintained after the UK leaves the EU.

It also concerns me that there are insufficient evidence and statistics on this matter. For example, no survey or study has been done on the impacts of fireworks and

according to the House of Commons Library the only statistics available on this issue are on hospital admissions due to the discharge of fireworks in England—which, by the way, have been increasing. We have heard that in the last year there were 4,000 such admissions. During the last debate on this issue, I asked the then Minister, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), whether he would gather statistics and data on the sale and use of fireworks. Can the Minister update us today on whether her Department is indeed in the process of compiling that data?

I sympathise with those affected by fireworks, but more should be done to communicate the details of the regulations that are currently in place. There should also be an effective communications campaign to highlight the impacts that fireworks can have on certain groups. Has the Minister considered putting in resources and working with consumer groups and animal welfare charities to put together a comprehensive and country-wide campaign to bring attention to concerns about firework use? If people are better informed about these issues, they may reconsider their use of fireworks.

There is very strong feeling on this matter, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) has described so well. I reiterate my call for the Minister to conduct a thorough review of the regulations that are already in place, to determine the changing impact of fireworks and what changes we need to make to the existing regulations.

6.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kelly Tolhurst):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Howarth. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) not only for introducing the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee but for her thoughtful and informative speech. I also thank all hon. Members who have taken part in today's debate. It is great to see such a highly subscribed Westminster Hall debate. I am also grateful to those who signed the e-petition that has brought us here today.

As has been discussed, a very similar debate took place in January, following a petition that also sought to “Change the laws governing the use of fireworks to include a ban on public use”.

That debate took place because 113,000 people signed that petition. Today, we are debating a petition that has received over 280,000 signatures. Again, it calls for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public and for displays at licensed venues only. I am also aware that there are campaigns under way regarding the use of fireworks, such as the one organised by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and a further petition, under the change.org banner, has received over 330,000 signatures. The issues have been debated thoroughly, both today and in January.

Let me also offer my thanks to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who had a debate on this issue scheduled for tomorrow but who, because of today's debate, has decided to combine it with this one. I thank her for forfeiting her debate.

I empathise with the concerns that have been raised, and the Government understand the strong feelings that many people have about fireworks. For those reasons,

I do not want to simply restate what the law is, although I will do so briefly for the benefit of hon. Members. We have legislation in place to regulate the supply, storage, possession, use and misuse of fireworks, to help to ensure public safety. These powers include powers to prosecute those who use fireworks in a dangerous or antisocial manner. Together, the restrictions set out in the Fireworks Act 2003, the Fireworks Regulations 2004 and the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 provide the regulatory framework that seeks to support the public's enjoyment of fireworks while effectively managing the risk of fireworks harming individuals, property or animals.

Retailers may sell fireworks without the need for a specific licence during short windows of time around the traditional fireworks periods of 5 November, new year's eve, Diwali and Chinese new year. However, if they wish to sell fireworks at other times of the year, they must seek a licence from their local authority. Age restrictions are in place to prevent the sale of fireworks to those under the age of 16 or 18, depending on the classification of the firework. There are further restrictions on the public possession of most fireworks by those under 18. Local authority trading standards officers have the powers to take action against those who sell fireworks illegally, including those selling fireworks without an appropriate licence, outside the normal selling period or to under-age children. Those powers also cover the sale of illegally imported fireworks and internet sales.

I recognise that the noise from fireworks can be distressing to some people and animals, and many Members today have shared their experiences and the concerns of their constituents. That is why there is a noise limit of 120 dB on fireworks available for consumer use. Consumers can also choose to buy from the wide range of low-noise or silent fireworks that are now available, as some hon. Members have highlighted.

I want to reassure hon. Members that the Government continue to take the enforcement of firework safety seriously. Trading standards can order the removal of unsafe products from the market and can take action against retailers who flout the law by selling fireworks to under-age children or who fail to abide by the licensing rules. The police do take action to combat antisocial behaviour and the dangerous use of fireworks by individuals, and many hon. Members today have described the illegal sale and use of fireworks. The hon. Members for Glasgow Central and for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) described serious criminal activity involving fireworks that has happened within their constituencies. Quite frankly, they outlined some disgusting behaviour by individuals in their use of fireworks. Such incidents are investigated by the police, leading to fines and in some cases imprisonment, so although I recognise hon. Members' concerns, I do not accept the premise that the police do not investigate what I would call criminal activity.

**Helen Jones:** Can the Minister tell us whether her Department now collects statistics on the number of prosecutions for fireworks offences? If it does, what is the trend? Are prosecutions going up or down?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank the hon. Lady for making that point. As some hon. Members have already outlined, when the last debate on this subject took place in January, we were just setting up the Office for Product

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Safety and Standards. We talked then about the collection of data, and my Department is working with National Trading Standards to consider ways to collect data to back up any proposed changes.

To recap, criminal events in which people use fireworks are investigated by police, if they are reported. In some cases, they attract fines and, in others, imprisonment.

**Mr Bailey:** I do not think that anyone would say that the police do not investigate. We are saying that the level of resources is such that they are not often able to carry out the sort of investigation that enables them to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Can the Minister give me an indication of just how many investigations have taken place, how many fixed penalty notices have been given and how many perpetrators of serious firework-related crime have been prosecuted?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I would like to refer to the hon. Gentleman's comment and also to his earlier remark about an incident in which a firework was thrown into a pub. He suggested that it was not investigated—

**Helen Jones:** He did not say that.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Perhaps I misunderstood, but that is what I heard from this end. My suggestion is that the police do take such matters seriously, in any constituency. Regarding any criminal activity that is identified as serious, the police absolutely attend.

**Patricia Gibson:** If I heard the Minister correctly, she suggested—if she did not say—that the work of the Office for Product Safety and Standards is ongoing. I think that is what she said—what I understood. If the office is not yet in a position to tell us how it will proceed on fireworks, with all the concerns around them, do we have a timeframe for when it might bring forward its own conclusions or proposals about how we move forward?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I will move on to that reference later in my speech, and to how potentially I, as the Minister responsible, and in line with the Office for Product Safety and Standards, would like to take the matter forward. If the hon. Lady would bear with me, that would be great.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central suggested that it was not possible to seize fireworks in some cases. I would like to reassure her that fireworks can be seized under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and the Explosives Act 1875. Just to give her an example, Greater Manchester seized 50 kg of bangers last year and 36 kg of category 4 fireworks, and Worcestershire seized fireworks from two different premises.

**Alison Thewliss:** I am not aware of the circumstances that the Minister mentions. Were those fireworks seized from commercial or residential premises? On bonfire night, Police Scotland deployed public order specialists in Pollokshields. They arrested people, and they are still arresting people and investigating. The problem is not the police's response but the source of the fireworks.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** To answer the hon. Lady's direct question, I have the data regarding the volumes as opposed to how many premises or individuals—[*Interruption.*] The volumes that I said, the 50 kg of—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr George Howarth (in the Chair):** Order. I do not think we can have mumbling from a sedentary position.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I said that the information I have is in regards to the volume and not to how that volume is made up.

Although only a minority of users of fireworks misuse them, I understand that one individual can have a massive impact on a community. That is why the Government continue to believe that the best way to continue to reduce any distress caused by fireworks is to work with industry, retailers and others to promote their safe and responsible use through guidance and public education and to ensure that appropriate action is taken against those who break the rules.

At the previous debate in January, the then Minister with responsibility for fireworks had just announced the creation of the new Office for Product Safety and Standards, and I am delighted that the office is already working with industry, retailers, charities and others, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and Netmums, to promote the safe and responsible use of fireworks and raise consumer awareness of firework safety. The campaign that the office has undertaken, with its partners, has reached more than a million people through social media, GP surgeries and post offices. The office has also been providing access to expert advice to support trading standards work in enforcing the regulations, including through the funding of the testing of potentially unsafe fireworks.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** Has there been any investigation of the issue of inspections by trading standards, as opposed to by the Health and Safety Executive? Two people lost their lives in a firework explosion in my constituency a few years ago, and it was implied that although trading standards are allowed to inspect places where up to 2 tonnes of fireworks are kept, they did not have enough expertise to deal with an amount of explosive that was greater than that which Guy Fawkes used in these Houses of Parliament. Would it not be better for the Health and Safety Executive to come in at a much lower level than 2 tonnes, which I believe is the law at the moment?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting his constituency concern. As he outlined, local trading standards and local authorities license the storage of fireworks, but the Health and Safety Executive ultimately has responsibility for the health and safety of all premises—the overriding health and safety regulations—whether it be for work or storage. Since I have been in post as Minister, I have not had any representations made to me on the storage of fireworks; they have been more about their use. From my personal experience, I can say that if there are operations within individuals' constituencies, or even if the general public have any concerns about where fireworks are being stored, they are absolutely to contact the local authority and trading standards, but I suggest that they also contact the Health and Safety Executive, which has the responsibility for carrying out investigative work when complaints have been made.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** If I may just follow up on that, in metropolitan areas the fire and rescue authorities usually have responsibility for the inspection of storage and they have real experience in that area. Would it not be better to ensure that not just in metropolitan areas but in county authorities a similar regime was put in place under the overall provision of the HSE, but involving fire and rescue authorities right from fairly low levels of firework storage?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion. I know that local forces work well with local authorities and other agencies on how best to implement regulation, control local problems and carry out enforcement. My hon. Friend makes a very good point and it is something we would have to discuss with those agencies and the local authorities involved.

During the debate in January, the then Minister agreed to meet with hon. Members who had an interest in the matter and discuss their concerns. As I said in response to a Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy question last week, I am open to hearing more and to receiving information and evidence on firework safety issues. This debate has certainly provided much information for further consideration.

**Patricia Gibson:** The Minister is being extremely generous with her time. I just want to ask her the question that I think everyone in this room wants to ask, and probably every member of the public who has an interest in the issue. Is she minded to have a consultation? I hear what she says about what has been going on, but is she minded to proceed down the path of a consultation on the sale of fireworks? I think that is what a lot of people want to know.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I hope to have a meeting, which I think may also have been offered by my predecessor, with hon. Members who are interested. That will be an opportunity for them to discuss this issue with me, because what has come out today is that there is no consensus. There are different elements, and a number of issues and different opinions have been discussed. That is absolutely fine—that is what a debate is about—but it is not something that we could run with. As the Minister responsible, I would like to come up with a suggested way forward, looking at things in a more organised way. That is why I suggest a face-to-face meeting with hon. Members to discuss their concerns and suggest how we might take this matter forward.

Following the January debate, officials were tasked with reviewing the guidance. In order to ensure that all views are taken into account, I have asked those officials to connect constructively with key stakeholders during the next steps, addressing any awareness or information gaps. The creation of the Office for Product Safety and Standards has given us the opportunity to make the best use of scientific evidence, incident data, risk and intelligence in our decision making. As a result, we are now in a much better position to ensure we have the right evidence-based approach to firework safety, and to commission new evidence where necessary. That will ensure we have a thorough understanding of the issues with the safe sale and use of fireworks.

I will respond to a couple of questions. The hon. Members for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) and for North Ayrshire and Arran

(Patricia Gibson) have asked about the consultation on fireworks, and I will happily meet Members to discuss a way forward. As I have already outlined, the Office for Product Safety and Standards is gathering data and looking at ways in which we can acquire the thorough evidence that we will need to back up anything we introduce. As for enforcement, I am personally committed to making sure that we enforce the law in this country, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough knows and as I highlighted last week.

We are also committed to consumer protection. I made my interest in that area expressly clear in two different debates last week, as well as my interest in the data and the work that we are doing. The Office for Product Safety and Standards and the Department are using data scientifically to make better decisions on consumer protection and safety.

**Gill Furniss:** It is really generous of the Minister to offer to meet those of us who have taken part in the debate. However, as I said earlier, it is 13 years since the last regulations were instated, so does she agree that a complete review of the situation is now timely? Things have changed since then. We have heard about the fireworks that sound like bombs, the high decibel levels, and the different lengths of time that things take, so it would be nice if the Minister could confirm that when she meets us, it will be with a view to reviewing the entire situation surrounding fireworks.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank the hon. Lady for her thanks for my suggestion that we should have a meeting. However, as I say, I have been in this role since July, and before I commit to anything, I need to be confident of what we would achieve and how we would achieve it. I am sad to say that I will not use today as an opportunity to confirm what the hon. Lady has asked for, but I have open ears and an open mind on what hon. Members might want to highlight.

**Susan Elan Jones:** If I were to attend the meeting with the Minister, I would say to her that for me, the most important item is restricting to certain dates the use of fireworks outside of organised displays. I think that every Member would have a different view on that, but the reason I am going to push the Minister a bit further about a public consultation is that the more views we have, the more informed the Government will be.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, but as I have highlighted, I will not commit to a consultation until I have met hon. Members, spoken with my officials, and worked out with them what the best way forward is. I will be quite frank: I am not for moving on that today. However, as I have highlighted, I have open ears and an open mind, and it is obvious from today's debate that there is a range of differing views.

To highlight two elements of the debate, I support hon. Members on the question of the problems they have raised, and to pay tribute to our emergency services. We have heard about how our emergency services have been targeted, with people using fireworks in a criminal way against those charged with protecting us. Like anyone listening to the debate and to the stories that hon. Members have recounted, I think it is disgusting that anyone working in the emergency services might be

[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

threatened with fireworks, even on a firework night. That is totally disgusting, and I share hon. Members' concerns about that.

I will also highlight hon. Members' concerns about animal welfare. We have heard personal stories about hon. Members' pets and the disastrous things that have happened to horses, and I can recount stories from years ago. I was pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) did not have a story about a hamster, and it was nice to hear about her father and his desire to have fireworks in their yard. My father would not, because the Catherine wheels that were available in the 1970s, when I was small, were dangerous: half of them did not finish or go off. Product safety has moved on significantly in the past 30 years, and although we are still targeting people who use fireworks incorrectly, the products have improved vastly. We recognise people's concerns about their pets and animals, but it is a difficult debate.

We have heard that we should move people to public displays, rather than their having fireworks in their garden. However, we have heard complaints about public displays as well as informal ones, so the question of what people want is complex. There are many differing opinions, and we will have to make judgments about how far we need to go and what the right balance is. Legislation and enforcement always involves a balance: ensuring both that people's rights are protected and consumers are safe, and that people are able to enjoy the things that I am sure everyone loves about fireworks.

**Alison Thewliss:** If the Scottish Government's consultation comes back next year in favour of greater restrictions on sale, will the Minister devolve the powers to the Scottish Parliament?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I am afraid that I cannot commit to that today, because I do not know what the Scottish Government's review will say. If I am still in post, I will happily look at it at that time.

I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. I reassure the Chamber that I am clear that the safety of our constituents remains a priority, and I will consider the work of my officials and look at the evidence base. I encourage everyone present who is interested and has contributed to the debate to meet me for a proper discussion, which will enable the Government to look at the problem and decide on the correct way forward. I also thank you, Mr Howarth, for your patience this afternoon.

7.19 pm

**Helen Jones:** I take this opportunity to thank all Members who have participated in the debate and made some very useful contributions to it. I would like to be

able to thank the Minister, but in 21 years I have seldom heard a response that took so little cognisance of the debate that had just happened.

We have now had three e-petition debates on the issue, yet the Government have taken no account of the public views that have been expressed time and time again. I remind them that the petitions system was set up as a joint system between Parliament and Government in the expectation that Government would take it seriously, and they clearly are not. The Minister has talked about enforcement, but she will not commit more resources to it.

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Jones:** One moment. The Minister has said—*[Interruption.]* No, I am not giving way; I have not finished my sentence. She has said she believes that she needs to collect more data and that there has been no unanimity in this debate. This debate was unanimous about wanting more controls on fireworks. She said that she is sorry for our emergency services, but she has put forward no way—

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Helen Jones:** I only have two minutes, so I am not giving way. Clear?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Two minutes? You have 10.

**Helen Jones:** I have two minutes to wind up. The Minister has said that she wants to protect our emergency services, but she has come up with no way of doing that. She has said, "We want to work with the industry." I wonder whether that will be as successful as the Government's obesity strategy has been in working with the industry concerned.

My constituents and other Members' constituents are clear that they want action. I know the Minister is a junior Minister and is unable to promise much herself, but the Home Office has to start taking this matter seriously or we will be here debating it time and time again until it does. My Committee will certainly want to look at it again. These are serious issues about people being injured, emergency workers being attacked and people's lives being made a misery. It is time that the Government started to take it seriously.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 231147 relating to the sale of fireworks to the public.

7.22 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

*Monday 26 November 2018*

## TREASURY

### Crown Dependencies Update

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):** Three new customs arrangements between the UK and the Crown Dependencies (Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey) were signed on 26 November 2018 in London. The texts of the arrangements are available on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website and will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The text of the arrangements will be scheduled to three related draft Orders in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course. These new customs arrangements are intended to come into force when the UK and Crown Dependencies leave the EU customs union and are compatible with any agreement the UK reaches with the EU.

[HCWS1113]

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Mims Davies):** The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council will take place in Brussels on 26 and 27 November 2018. The UK's Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU will represent the UK for the youth session on 26 November and culture-audiovisual and sports sessions on 27 November.

#### *Youth*

This session of the Council will begin with the partial general approach on the regulation on the European Solidarity Corps 2021-2027. This Council will then seek to adopt a resolution on the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, as well as conclusions on youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters.

Also tabled for this session is a policy debate on the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027: from vision to implementation.

#### *Culture-Audiovisual*

This meeting will begin with a progress report on the regulation on creative Europe 2021-2027.

The meeting will then look to adopt conclusion on the work plan for culture 2019-2022. In addition the meeting will seek to adopt conclusions on the strengthening of European content in the digital economy.

There will also be a policy debate on tackling the spread of disinformation online, looking at the challenges for the media ecosystem.

Information will be provided from the German delegation on dealing with items from colonial contexts in European collections. In addition, information will also be provided from the Danish delegation on problems concerning protection and transnational resale of tickets to cultural and sports events.

#### *Sport*

The sport session of EYCS will begin with the adoption of Council conclusions on the economic dimension of sport and its socio-economic benefits. This will be followed by a policy debate on major sporting events as drivers of innovation.

The EU member states represented in the World Anti-Doping Agency Foundation Board will present information on the Foundation Board meeting on 14 and 15 November.

#### *Other*

There will be information from the Romanian delegation, setting out its work programmes as the incoming presidency for the first half of 2019.

[HCWS1111]

## JUSTICE

### Enforcement Agents

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer):** The Secretary of State for Justice and I have launched a call for evidence on the implementation of reforms contained in the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007, introduced by the Government in 2014.

The Government are committed to ensuring that all enforcement agents (formerly known as bailiffs) treat debtors fairly and operate in a responsible and proportionate way. We also recognise that the enforcement of debt is necessary for both the economy and the justice system and that enforcement agents carry out a difficult role in often challenging circumstances. However, we have heard accounts of a minority of enforcement agents who use aggressive tactics and make people's lives a misery. We are determined that such rogue practices should be stopped. To this end the Government will be actively examining the case for an independent regulator as part of the call for evidence.

The 2014 reforms aimed to provide protection to debtors from the aggressive pursuit of their debt from enforcement agents, while balancing this against the need for effective enforcement. They introduced a set of rules which detail what goods an enforcement agent can and cannot take, how and when they can enter premises and what fees they can charge. They introduced mandatory training and an enhanced court-based certification process for enforcement agents. They also provided safeguards for vulnerable people so they are able to get assistance and advice, and required enforcement agents to be trained to recognise vulnerable people.

The information gathered from our call for evidence will inform the Ministry of Justice's second post-implementation review of these reforms.

The Government published the first post-implementation review on 2 April 2018. They found that the reforms had led to many positive changes. This included improved transparency and consistency, both in terms of the enforcement process and the fees charged by enforcement agents. The report noted, however, that some enforcement agents were still perceived to be acting aggressively and not complying with the new rules.

The paper includes questions about the complaints process following concerns raised that debtors are experiencing difficulties in making complaints about

enforcement agents. We want to improve our understanding about the volume and nature of complaints about enforcement agents and how they are handled. We are also seeking views about whether the regulations around complaints sanctions need to be improved and if so how.

The paper also asks questions about the implementation of the regulations concerning: safeguards to protect vulnerable debtors; the new training and certification process for civil enforcement agents; the requirement for enforcement agents to send standardised letters to debtors; and the regulations about the recovery of commercial rent arrears.

A key part of the 2014 reforms was the introduction of a fee structure which clearly sets out what a debtor can be charged at each stage of the enforcement action. The fee structure was designed to incentivise debtors to settle their debt at the earliest stage possible. The paper includes questions about the impact of those reforms.

The Government intend to complete the review of the implementation of the 2014 reforms before making a decision about whether further reform is necessary. Any prospective policy options will be presented in a public consultation.

The call for evidence will collect evidence about the operation of both High Court Enforcement Officers and civil enforcement agents (also known as certificated enforcement agents or private bailiffs).

It will run for 12 weeks to 17 February 2019.

A copy of the call for evidence will be placed in the Libraries of the House and will be available online at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS1112]

## PRIME MINISTER

### Exiting the European Union

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** This is a statement, for the purposes of section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, that political agreement

has been reached. I am of the opinion that an agreement in principle has been reached in negotiations under article 50(2) of the treaty on European Union on the substance of:

- a. the arrangements for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, and
- b. the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom after withdrawal.

A copy of the negotiated withdrawal agreement which, in my opinion, reflects the agreement in principle so far as relating to the arrangements for withdrawal, including provisions for the implementation period, has been laid before the House on Monday 26 November with the title "Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community".

A copy of the framework for the future relationship which, in my opinion, reflects the agreement in principle so far as relating to the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom, has been laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 with the title "Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom".

These documents are being presented to Parliament at the earliest opportunity in order to facilitate the fullest possible scrutiny ahead of the parliamentary debate and vote on the approval of these documents.

At this stage, the withdrawal agreement represents a version of the text which has been agreed, but has not yet been formally signed. Before this formal signature takes place, the agreement must complete the European Union's jurist-linguist translation process. During that time, minor technical corrections will be made to the text, though these changes will not affect the substance of the agreement. The laying of the withdrawal agreement before Parliament at this stage does not therefore trigger any procedures under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

[HCWS1110]

# ORAL ANSWERS

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