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

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Friday 11 January 2019**

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# House of Commons

*Friday 11 January 2019*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Points of Order

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you or your good offices have been informed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that she might make a statement to this House this morning. I understand from numerous reports in the newspapers that the Secretary of State is giving a speech this morning—it is being trailed in the media—to confirm that the very unpopular two-child limit in universal credit for children who are older than 24 months is due to be scrapped, and that the managed migration of claimants to universal credit will slow down. Given that we are sitting today and there are many Members here on both sides of the Chamber, this would be an opportune and, in fact, appropriate moment for the Secretary of State to come to the House. Do you know whether that is going to happen?

**Mr Speaker:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. The short answer is that I have not been informed of any intention on the part of the Secretary of State to deliver an oral statement to the House today. I have just been advised from the Table that there is to be a written ministerial statement today. However, as the hon. Lady, who is a keen student of parliamentary procedure, will know from her own experience, the proffering of a written ministerial statement does not preclude the possibility of oral exchanges. While such exchanges do not seem set to take place today, there is every possibility that they can and will take place on a subsequent day, and the hon. Lady can look forward to that possibility with eager anticipation.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I heard the Secretary of State speaking on the radio this morning about these issues. Is it not discourteous that she spoke on the radio before coming to this House to announce a change of Government policy?

**Mr Speaker:** I did not hear the interview. There has been considerable focus this week on Parliament and how matters should be handled. Let me say, for the avoidance of doubt, in terms so clear as to brook of no misunderstanding, that if a change in Government policy is to be announced, especially on a major matter that has been the subject of considerable controversy, it is proper for that announcement of a change first to be made to the House. A statement, of course, is a form of speech, but it is then customarily followed by substantial interrogation. If somebody can make a speech outside the House, it is perfectly open to that person to make a statement in the House. Respect for the House, and in

particular for the Chamber, is a matter of the highest importance as far as I am concerned, and it should be so far as all Governments are concerned.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The Select Committee on Work and Pensions has today published a report calling for this exact change of policy. The Secretary of State has given multiple interviews this morning, well before any written statement has been put before the House. What measures does the House have to hold the Secretary of State to account for a clear breach of how such an announcement should be made? It looks very much like a Government attempt to remove negative headlines in order to get some positive press coverage.

**Mr Speaker:** Nothing can be done immediately. There is, as far as I can see, no scope for bringing the Secretary of State to the Chamber today, unless she were to offer to come later in our proceedings. That request could be entertained, but otherwise I think the hon. Gentleman will have to content himself with the likely prospect of exchanges early next week.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It seems to be an all too regular occurrence that announcements by this Government are made outside this House. Of course, it is open to hon. Members to seek your permission to ask an urgent question when such announcements are not made to the House. When considering such a request, would your office take into account the fact that the Government have not offered hon. Members an opportunity to ask oral questions, even though the issue might not be deemed urgent having been dealt with in a written statement a couple of days earlier?

**Mr Speaker:** I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman for gently advising me on these matters. The short answer is yes, it certainly would be taken into account. The Clerk of the House has just swivelled around to say to me that he thinks my record on this subject is pretty clear. What I would say to the hon. Gentleman, who is also a keen student of parliamentary procedure, is this: context is all. The context of the situation is of the highest importance. The fact that there might have been some days' coverage of the issue—in some people's minds rendering a parliamentary treatment less urgent—is not the only consideration. The question is: was the House informed? Does the House wish to air the issue? Is there an appetite to question the Minister? The Speaker takes all those considerations into account, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman need feel any anxiety on that front.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on how I can best explain to my constituents why we are here for a sixth day of debate, when we were meant to have a vote in early December—on 11 December—on a deal that has largely not changed since. It is now 11 January, and there are 77 days to go until exit day, so I seek advice from you on how we can solicit a vote today, so that we can get on with rejecting this doomed deal and start looking at other options such as a people's vote.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very sorry to disappoint the hon. Lady, but she inquires how a vote can be forced today, and the answer is that there is not scope to do so. The Business of the House motion was passed as amended on Wednesday, and if the hon. Lady can contain herself—I do understand her frustration and irritation on this matter—she should have an opportunity to vote on Tuesday. Meanwhile she can always communicate to her constituents, as I rather imagine that she will, that she was present and correct and in her place seeking to contribute today, and reminding the House of the sequence of events that has recently unfolded. I am sorry that I cannot offer any better prospect to the hon. Lady than votes on Tuesday, but I think that the rest is history.

## European Union (Withdrawal) Act

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

*Debate resumed (Orders, 4 December and 9 January).*

*Question again proposed,*

That this House approves for the purposes of section 13(1)(b) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the negotiated withdrawal agreement laid before the House on Monday 26 November 2018 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’ and the framework for the future relationship 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’.

9.41 am

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** Next week, this House will be asked to make one of the most momentous parliamentary decisions. We will be asked to support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister’s Brexit deal. Each and every one of us will have to make a choice—a choice that will determine the future of the United Kingdom. I am clear that the deal on the table is the best option available for ensuring an orderly exit from the European Union and the best option for delivering the Brexit that people voted for in the referendum.

The deal will have a significant impact on the UK’s immigration system, and it will protect EU citizens’ rights. Concern over uncontrolled immigration from the EU was a major factor in the decision to leave the EU. People wanted control over immigration. They wanted future decisions on UK immigration policy to be taken in this country and by this Parliament, and they wanted immigration brought down to sustainable levels, and that is what this deal delivers.

Just before Christmas I published the immigration White Paper, which set out the Government’s plans in more detail. It drew heavily on the advice of the independent Migration Advisory Committee, to which I repeat my thanks for its thorough and comprehensive analysis.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sajid Javid:** I will take a couple of interventions.

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way and for beginning his remarks by confirming that a major factor in the referendum was immigration. He will be aware that yesterday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) stood almost exactly here and said exactly the same thing, it was hurled down by protest from Conservative Back Benchers, some of whom are still here today. Does he have any indication of why they accept it when it comes from the Secretary of State, but when the same truth is told by the Scottish National party it gets hurled down in protest? Is it that they only like to hear things from themselves and they cannot face accepting the truth from anybody else?

**Sajid Javid:** I was here in the Chamber yesterday at the moment to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I do not recognise that description at all. What I do recognise is that over a number of years in this House, there have been debates on immigration. One of the issues that hon. Members have reflected from their

constituencies is a concern over increasing levels of immigration and a need to take more control, and that is exactly what this deal delivers.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way so early in his speech. The No.1 priority for most countries, particularly in Asia, when doing a trade deal will be to loosen the UK Government's immigration policies so that they can get more people working and living in this country. Given that he has confirmed that the Government stand by their policy of cutting net migration to tens of thousands, how does he propose reconciling that number with trade deals with other countries?

**Sajid Javid:** What the hon. Gentleman has highlighted is that, because we are leaving the EU, we can actually contemplate for the first time having our own trade deals with other countries, in Asia or elsewhere in the world. When such trade deals are struck, there are clearly deals to be made on services and on the trade of goods, and each time we strike such deals, we will look carefully at them and do whatever it takes for them to work in the British national interest.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Sajid Javid:** I want to make some progress.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

**Sajid Javid:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I will make some progress.

**Mike Gapes:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Will he take this opportunity to condemn the leaflet put out by Vote Leave during the campaign, saying that 75 million Turks would be coming into our country over the next few years?

**Sajid Javid:** That particular information was completely incorrect. People who were members of Vote Leave at the time have also spoken against that leaflet. We do not want to rerun the debate, but I am happy to say that of course that information was wrong.

I referred to the report and advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee. The MAC looked in detail at the impact of European migration on the UK's economy and society and produced recommendations based on its analysis.

The White Paper was also informed by my own discussions with right hon. and hon. Members, as well as with businesses and civil society groups up and down the country. The White Paper outlined our intention to build a new immigration system founded on the principle that entry to the UK should be on the basis of skill rather than of nationality, and that the existing automatic preference for EU citizens will end. Alongside that, I introduced the Immigration Bill. The Bill is a key step to ending free movement once and for all. For the first time in more than 40 years, we will have full control over our borders; the decisions over who comes to the UK will be firmly in our hands. We will ensure that all people coming into this country will need to have permission to do so.

But control over immigration does not mean closing our door or turning our back on immigration, far from it. Our country is far stronger because of immigration: it is stronger economically, culturally and socially. It is stronger in every way because of immigration, and I am determined to continue to have an immigration system that welcomes the very best talent from across the world, helping us to build an open, welcoming and outward looking post-Brexit Britain.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. He will be well aware of the immense contribution of citizens from around the world, but particularly those from the EU who make an immense contribution to the local economy in Worcestershire. Does he agree that the deal on the table gives them reassurance and comfort that they have the right to stay and that they are welcome, which is the best way of giving them peace of mind?

**Sajid Javid:** Of course I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend, especially when it comes to Worcestershire, our home county. I will turn to that specific point in a few minutes.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I listened very closely to what the Secretary of State just said about the benefits of immigration. He will know that there are many pressures on our public services, particularly our national health service, up and down the country. It is already difficult, particularly for GP surgeries, for example, to recruit people from beyond Europe. The concerns of those surgeries are that, post 29 March, they will have to pay an inordinate amount and spend an incredible amount of time processing documents in order to get the doctors we so desperately need because we have a shortage of GPs and many other healthcare professionals. We have a vacancy rate of 10% in our national health service.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to talk about the benefits to our public services of immigration, such as doctors and nurses in the health service. That was partly recognised in the change I made last year to remove nurses and doctors from the tier 2 cap. The new immigration system set out in the White Paper, which refers specifically to benefits for the public sector, is perfectly compatible with the needs of the public sector.

The White Paper sets out proposals for a secure and streamlined border. EU visitors will be able to come to the UK without a visa and will continue to be able to use e-gates. In keeping with our position that the EU should not automatically receive preferential treatment, we announced at the end of last year that the use of e-gates would be extended later this year to nationals of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States. That is evidence that the UK is open for business and committed to ensuring the swiftest possible entry for visitors.

In line with the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee, our future immigration system will contain a route for skilled workers. We will expand the definition of skilled workers to encompass those in mid-skilled occupations. The route will be uncapped, and we are removing the resident labour market test for highly skilled workers. The Migration Advisory Committee

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argued that it burdened businesses with unnecessary bureaucracy and was ineffective. Both those changes will greatly assist businesses and speed up processes.

We will retain the protections that exist for British workers, such as the skills charge. For intermediate-skilled jobs, we will engage with employers and businesses to consider whether a form of the resident labour market test would still be appropriate.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; he is being very generous with his time. How does he envisage his approach working with someone like Steve Jobs's dad, who came from Syria? How would such people come into this country and contribute to the prosperity and wealth of this nation?

**Sajid Javid:** If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I think he will see as I progress with my remarks what routes of entry we have for those who bring talent and skills to our country.

The Migration Advisory Committee has recommended that the salary threshold for the skilled worker route be £30,000. There has, of course, been a lively debate on that point already. We will run a 12-month process of engagement with business, employers, universities and others. Only at the conclusion of that work will we determine the level at which the threshold should be set. In any case, we will retain the shortage occupation list, which allows for a lower threshold in jobs such as nursing where there are shortages.

There will also be a new route for workers at any skill level, but it will be for only a temporary period. That will allow businesses to have the staff they need as we move to the new immigration system. It also gives them a clear incentive to invest more in training young British people now. Access to low-skilled labour from abroad should never be a substitute for investment in the skills of British people. Our new system will ensure that it is not.

Members have pointed out that agriculture has a particular reliance on migrant labour. I have listened carefully to those concerns and we will pilot a seasonal agricultural workers scheme in the spring. That announcement has already been well received.

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What evidence does the Secretary of State have that employers are not already trying to train local talent among young people through apprenticeships and other schemes? For example, people in the construction industry in Oxfordshire tell me that they are desperate to do so, but that they cannot do it with the local population alone. What evidence does he have that employers are not training young people from this country and trying to do both?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady asks about evidence. At the start of my remarks I referred to the Migration Advisory Committee, an independent body that went out and did a lot of research on the impact of European migration. That is one point of evidence. Its report was published in September, and it sounds like she has not read it. I suggest that she does so, as it contains a lot of

evidence on these issues. It is also self-evident that for some employers it is all too easy to reach out and get labour from abroad when they could look at domestic labour and invest in skills. That investment is not happening at the scale we want to see, and the new immigration system will encourage it.

The White Paper sets out that the UK will continue to be open and welcoming to international students. The numbers of international students in our universities are at record levels. I reiterate that there will be no cap on the number of international students we accept. That means that more students will get the opportunity to enjoy the world-class education our universities have to offer. To help our universities compete for the best talent around the world and to help our economy, we are increasing the period for which international students in higher education can remain in the UK at the end of their studies, giving them greater opportunities to find skilled work.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On the availability of alternative British workers, what does the Home Secretary say to UK Hospitality, which points out that there are not enough unemployed young Londoners to fill the posts if just 15% of the current hotel workforce is not available because of visa restrictions or because of our leaving the European Union? To give an example from rural areas, what does he say to farmers who are desperate for a large low-skilled fruit picking workforce that simply is not available in the local community?

**Sajid Javid:** I say to the hospitality industry and others who have concerns about the end of freedom of movement that it is perfectly possible to have our own independent immigration policy without freedom of movement, as many other countries with successful hospitality sectors do, while catering for the needs of all sectors. That is what this balanced immigration package achieves. We have been speaking to many different industrial sectors, including that sector, and we will continue to listen, but I believe that what we have set out will absolutely meet their needs.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State has just said that there will be no cap on international students, yet the Government include international students in their migration targets. How will he square that circle?

**Sajid Javid:** First, the decision about what is included in immigration statistics and what is not is an independent decision for the Office for National Statistics. I have discussed the issue with it and last year we asked the Migration Advisory Committee to look into it. Its recommendation was to keep the number in the statistics, reflecting the fact that, although most students leave the country, there is an impact on infrastructure and public services. I am very sympathetic to the issue the hon. Lady raises, but I remind her that it is an independent decision for the Office for National Statistics.

**Ian Murray:** Will the Home Secretary give way?

**Sajid Javid:** On this point.

**Ian Murray:** I am very grateful to the Home Secretary; he is being incredibly generous. In the last few minutes, he has said that there will be no cap on international students, that the hospitality sector will be fine, that agriculture will be fine and that trade deals will be fine, despite the No. 1 priority for most countries in a trade deal being to loosen up the visa regime. How can any of that—be honest with the public, because it is about time the Government started being honest with the public—be compatible with cutting net migration to the tens of thousands? It is a lie, isn't it?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. For the avoidance of doubt, the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting for one moment that a Minister would lie in this Chamber.

**Ian Murray:** No, Mr Speaker. The manifesto pledge to cut net migration to the tens of thousands seems, on the basis of the answers, to be the lie; it is not the Secretary of State himself. He can clarify that when he comes back to the Dispatch Box.

**Mr Speaker:** I am sure that he can clarify the situation, but there is no allegation of personal dishonour against the Home Secretary.

**Ian Murray:** Not at all.

**Mr Speaker:** We are grateful. I call the Home Secretary.

**Sajid Javid:** By focusing on high-skilled migration and not low-skilled migration, this package is perfectly capable of reducing immigration. Indeed, I believe it will reduce it to much lower, much more sustainable levels.

Another very important aspect of our future immigration system is that it is designed to meet the needs of the entire United Kingdom. Immigration is a reserved matter, but it is important that we take into account the particular circumstances of different parts of the UK. That is why we will continue with our shortage occupation list policy to meet the needs of Scotland, and we will also consider similar measures for Wales. In recognition of Northern Ireland's position as the only part of the UK that will have a land border with the EU, we are asking the MAC to compile a separate shortage occupation list for Northern Ireland.

I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of our relationship with the Republic of Ireland. We are long-standing friends, allies and partners, and we will preserve the common travel area, as well as the rights that Irish citizens enjoy. There is an unbreakable bond between the people of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and that will never change.

Together, these changes will deliver a system that backs employers, giving them access to highly skilled workers, while also ensuring that they can drive up productivity and wages. It will also support the public services we all rely on, giving them access to the skilled workers they need.

**Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con):** The Home Secretary has said he could never contemplate anything that put Northern Ireland in a different position. Why then does the withdrawal agreement, in the backstop proposals, specifically do that and create a border down the Irish sea? The Government have pledged repeatedly

that they would not even contemplate such a thing, but it is now in the agreement—in black and white—in the Ireland-Northern Ireland protocol.

**Sajid Javid:** My right hon. Friend makes an observation about the withdrawal agreement. It does of course include the backstop, but the Government's intention is to avoid the backstop altogether. Even if there was such a need—if we had not reached a final agreement within the two-year period, which I believe we absolutely can—there is an option for the Government to extend the implementation period, which would avoid the issue that my right hon. Friend has highlighted.

So far, I have outlined some significant changes to our immigration system, which will be implemented in a phased approach from 2021. However, in some other areas there will be continuity rather than change. EU citizens already living here will continue to be able to live their lives here much as they do now. We value their significant contribution to the UK, and whatever happens, as we have said many times before, we want them to stay. We know how important our EU friends are to our economy, our society, our families, our history and also our future.

We have launched a series of trials of the EU settlement scheme, and I am pleased to say that they have all gone well so far. The scheme will be open to all EU citizens living in the UK by 30 March, and it will be run in the event of deal or no deal. The scheme is designed to be short, simple and user-friendly, and we need everyone to participate.

Some right hon. and hon. Members have questioned why we need such a scheme in the first place. One of the reasons is to have a clear picture of who is in the country. I saw at first hand with Windrush the problems of not having a comprehensive registration scheme, and we cannot allow something like that ever to happen again. The decision made many decades ago not to have a suitable registration scheme for Commonwealth citizens in the UK was in hindsight a huge mistake, and I will not repeat it on my watch. There will be a proper, easy-to-use scheme in place for our EU friends so that their rights are protected. We will have to communicate it clearly to ensure the scheme is fully used, but our message to EU citizens throughout is absolutely clear: "Deal or no deal, we want you to stay".

Although we have made it very clear that, after Brexit, EU citizens will be able to continue their lives much as before, not all EU member states have made a similar commitment to British citizens living in their countries. In fact, a number of countries have given no public assurances about the status of British nationals in the event of no deal. I think that is unacceptable, and I urge them to do so without any further delay.

I have outlined today what this deal means for immigration. For the first time in a generation, we will be able to build an immigration system that is designed in Britain, is made in Britain and serves only our national interest. The deal protects not only EU citizens living in the UK, but UK nationals living in the EU. It also goes much further. It is about protecting our economy and our security, and creating an immigration system over which we have full control.

Yes, the deal is a compromise—no one is claiming that it is perfect—but it is the only deal on offer that provides an orderly exit from the EU. The fact is that

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the clock is ticking. Now is the time for everyone to get behind this deal. It is in our hands to decide if we want this deal, no deal or, indeed, no Brexit at all. I know which option I prefer, and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to join me in supporting this deal.

10.5 am

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for his remarks. This is probably the most important debate that the House of Commons will engage in in this generation. It is easy to get lost in the parliamentary tactics and the technocratic detail, but this is actually a debate about the future of this country and what sort of Britain we want to be. It has become an excessively polarised debate, particularly in recent weeks, so I want to stress, for Opposition Members, that we are committed to honouring the referendum vote and, more than that, that we understand what moved so many millions of our fellow citizens to vote for Brexit. I just make the point that we should not be excessively polarised.

**Mike Gapes:** My right hon. Friend says that we are committed to honouring the referendum vote. Does she mean that we will support Brexit even if it damages the very communities that we as Labour Members of Parliament represent?

**Ms Abbott:** I would like to thank my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. Actually, the position of the Labour party was set out in the manifesto on which both he and I campaigned, and we are committed to a jobs-first Brexit that will not harm our economy. I repeat: we want to honour the referendum vote.

I remind the House that I will not take lectures from the Home Secretary on the iniquities of the EU. I have an immaculate record of voting against all measures of further EU integration. In fact, I remember very clearly voting against the vital clauses in the Maastricht treaty. The reason why I remember it is that at that time both Front Benches were in support of the Maastricht treaty, and those of us who wanted to vote against it had to stay up to the middle of the night to cast our votes, so I remember it very clearly. He should not lecture this side on what is problematic about the EU.

We campaigned in the referendum on remain and reform, and we do not resile from the fact that there are aspects of the EU that needed reform. Opposition Members do not want to see an excessively polarised debate. However, we are now resuming the debate after the longest parliamentary interruption in modern times, and Government Members ought to be a little embarrassed about this long interregnum in the debate and the fact that, even at this late stage, it seems that they will have great difficulty in getting their deal through.

I will deal with the issues that the Home Secretary has raised, but first I want to deal with issues of safety and security, because there is an argument that there is no more important a responsibility for the Government of the day than securing the safety and security of the United Kingdom. The Home Secretary will be aware that just this week two former MI6 and defence chiefs went on the record urging Conservative MPs to vote

against this deal because it threatens national security. I put it to the Home Secretary that ex-heads of MI6 and ex-defence chiefs might know a little bit more about security than the Home Secretary or even myself.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Abbott:** I want to make some progress with this part of my speech but I will give way in due course.

We believe that this deal treats the issue of safety and security with a degree of recklessness. As it stands, this deal would potentially abolish the complex and highly effective co-operation that has been established between this country and other members of the EU in the areas of freedom, justice and security. It will constitute an ultra-hard Brexit in each of these areas, and could have severely negative consequences in all of them.

A long list of vital security and policing tools will be lost under this agreement. As matters stand, the European arrest warrant will go, along with real-time access to the Europol database. There is as yet nothing to allow access to Schengen Information System II or the existing Eurojust co-operation to continue. There is also no agreement to ensure that this country's systems will be regarded as adequate for data protection, which would block mutual database access. On migration, there is a continuing lack of clarity about the extent to which the UK will continue to co-operate with the EU on the common European asylum system, which is relevant because future co-operation will now need to go beyond tackling only irregular migration. All these failures will have severe consequences for policing, security co-operation, and key areas of freedom and justice.

Currently, our police and security agencies across Europe can access one another's data in real time to monitor the movement of drug and people traffickers, organised criminals and terrorists. The serial failings of this Government mean that large parts of this arrangement may well go if we vote for this deal.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Near the beginning of her remarks the right hon. Lady prayed in aid the former head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, and the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie. But they want to leave the European Union without this agreement. They do not support what she is saying, but she seemed to be linking their names with what she is saying. That would be misleading if it were her intention, but I am sure that it was not.

**Ms Abbott:** I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman does not think that I was clear. I agree with what Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie have said about security. I am not attempting to link their views to anything else I may say in this speech.

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** Unfortunately, not everybody does agree with that viewpoint. In fact, Lord Ricketts—the former national security adviser—has said on Twitter in the last few minutes:

“The claims in this letter are nonsense. Our intelligence links with the US have nothing to do with the EU and we'd be unaffected by the deal.”

I think I would rather believe Lord Ricketts than the right hon. Lady.

**Ms Abbott:** I am not asking the House to believe me. I am simply drawing to the attention of the House what former heads of MI6 and defence chiefs have said. It is for the House to weigh up what value it gives to the opinion of those gentlemen.

**Sajid Javid:** Perhaps it would help if I responded to that remark as well. I have a great deal of respect for Lord Guthrie and Sir Richard Dearlove, but on the particular issue in this letter, they are wrong. There is nothing in this deal that changes our relationship with NATO, with our US allies as intelligence partners or with our wider “Five Eyes” partners—nothing at all.

**Ms Abbott:** First, much of that has not been decided; it is part of the future political framework. Furthermore, it is for the House and the public watching this debate to decide what weight they give to the opinions of former heads of MI6 and former defence chiefs. The point I am making is that it seems to me that the Home Secretary has been a little careless in his assurances around security and the safety of the nation, and it is at least debatable whether this deal gives us the assurance we need.

**Nigel Huddleston:** The right hon. Lady mentioned data and adequacy. I am sure that she is well aware that the UK leads the world in this area, and we are highly confident that we will be adequate—in fact, more than adequate—because the EU has followed many of the things we have led, rather than the other way round. Rather than spread fear, perhaps she can have confidence that the UK will lead and continue to lead in these areas.

**Ms Abbott:** I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is speaking in good faith, but I went to Brussels with colleagues before Christmas, and the key stakeholders on issues of security there were clear that the position that we are in at this point—without a security treaty—is highly problematic. It may be that we lead the world on data security at this point, but we have to give the type of assurances that the EU will accept if we are to have any chance of continuing co-operation in the future.

Many of the operational treaty functions in these areas—security and the safety of the realm—derive solely from our membership of the European Union. Labour believes that it is the height of irresponsibility to abandon these arrangements without any plan or, in some cases, any possibility of replacing them. Much of this problem arises from the Prime Minister’s own red lines—for example, her insistence on removing the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice without providing an alternative. Any warrant needs oversight and the possibility of judicial appeal. The Prime Minister must have known that when she made it a red line; she was irresponsible if she did not know that.

All along Labour has upheld six tests that any deal would have to meet in order for us to vote for it. The fifth of these tests is: does it protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime? I put it to the Treasury Bench that, on the basis of what we know, this deal will not necessarily protect national security and our capacity to tackle cross-border crime. On those grounds alone, we believe that the Prime Minister has failed to meet this test. This deal is not even close. The Prime Minister and this Government

have delivered only a hard Brexit on security, justice, police and freedom. On that basis, Labour will not be voting for it.

I turn to the question of immigration because all the polling shows that concerns about migration were an important factor for people voting to leave, so it is very important as we go forward in negotiating Brexit that we deal with these issues coherently and fairly, in a way that is not designed to excite public passions and that, above all, is in the best interests of society, the economy, jobs and business. I am afraid that Labour Members do not believe that that is what the Government are currently doing.

The Government have finally produced an immigration Bill of sorts—the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill—but what does it say? Actually, it says very little. Front and centre of this Bill is a declaration that freedom of movement will be ending, but the Government have not told us what will replace it. This matters, because, as I have said, immigration is a key issue. It was an important issue before, during and after the June 2016 referendum. Those on the Treasury Bench may not think that, but millions of our constituents do, and millions of our constituents are anxious that we get this issue right.

Beyond the purely declaratory ending of freedom of movement—which, under the Government’s plan, ends anyway—is it true that the promised clampdown on net migration is really coming? The reality is that the White Paper offers no such promise. Instead it is replete with assurances that businesses large and small will be able to maintain, or even increase, their access to labour from overseas. There are literally dozens of these assurances, so there is a possibility that all those who voted leave to reduce or even end net migration will be disappointed.

When we debate the Bill next week, we will have a number of questions for the Home Secretary.

**Neil Coyle:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that when the Government say that people voted on the basis of immigration, actually for many people immigration was a proxy for the pressure that eight years of austerity measures—six years at that point—had put on public services? People felt that they could not get to see a GP on time or get into hospital due to pressure on the NHS. Does she agree that that is why people felt that somehow immigration was a cause of concern for them and their families?

**Ms Abbott:** I do agree. Very often, when people raise concerns about migration, it is a proxy for other concerns. None the less, the Government have a responsibility to make proposals on migration that are good for society, good for business, and good for our economy.

On the question of EU citizens, the Home Secretary has given a number of assurances, but we have not heard so much about EU citizens and their families. There can be no question but that the process of registering over 3 million EU citizens could well be problematic. On the basis of the immigration and nationality directorate’s record in the past, there must be some concern.

**Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con):** The right hon. Lady said that there has been a lack of clarity in respect of EU nationals’ families, but actually there have been a number of statements by Government

[*Luke Graham*]

that have clarified the rights that people have to go back to their families to Europe and to bring their spouses and children over. It is not a lack of clarity but merely a lack of reading by the right hon. Lady.

**Ms Abbott:** It is that tone that has done so much to damage people's good faith on where the Government are going on this issue. I have met lawyers who specialise in these issues and EU nationals who have concerns around these issues. There is no question but that very many EU nationals still have very real concerns about the process and about their families and dependants. Rather than adopting that tone, the hon. Gentleman would be better advised to speak to EU nationals and find out their concerns for himself.

**Luke Graham:** I am sorry, but I have spoken to a number of my constituents who are EU nationals. I have fought to get them passports. I have made sure that their rights are heard. I hear them every single week. I have had people in tears in my office. Because of the clarity of the information given, I can help those constituents, fight for their rights, and secure their place in the United Kingdom. I want a quality debate, and so do our constituents, so let us stick to the facts, not the fiction.

**Ms Abbott:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is keeping up with his casework. However, if he talked to organisations that represent EU nationals as a whole and to lawyers nationally who deal with these issues, he would know that there is still too much that is not resolved—above all, the capacity of the immigration and nationality directorate to process over 3 million EU nationals effectively.

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** I want to reassure the right hon. Lady on this. As she will know, the EU settled status scheme has been in its pilot beta testing. We have completed both phase 1 and phase 2, and phase 3 will open on 21 January. That is absolutely because we want to make sure that it works for these individuals and that we can give them the reassurance they need before we require to have the system open. In every major IT programme, as she will know only too well, it is much better to go through a testing process than to launch it straightaway. I want to reassure her, in case she had missed it, that that is exactly what we are doing.

**Ms Abbott:** I am aware of the testing process. I am aware of the issues that have arisen. I am also aware that the testing process has involved people who are volunteers taking part. The challenge will arise when the mass of EU migrants choose to go through that process. I will remind the right hon. Lady, in the months to come, about her complacency about her system.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Can I just assure her that I will speak to her with respect and not the patronising tone used by the Minister? Further to what has been said, and particularly to the comments of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (*Luke Graham*), every single statement that

the Government made on the way that their proposal was to be implemented was contradicted by a further statement from the Government either in this House or outside in the press. If there was any confusion in the minds of EU citizens, was not the problem caused by Ministers contradicting themselves?

**Ms Abbott:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Yes, one of the problems was Ministers contradicting themselves. I repeat that in the months to come, I will be reminding the Minister about her complacency about this system. I would remind her also that this is not just a matter of to-ing and fro-ing in the House of Commons—it is about people's lives, people's families, and people's security. It is also about businesses concerned about what is going to happen to valued employees. We need to move beyond point-scoring and address the people who will suffer if this system does not function—[*Interruption.*]

**Neil Coyle rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the right hon. Lady takes the intervention, let me say that there is quite a lot of chuntering from a sedentary position going on. The hon. Member for North Dorset (*Simon Hoare*), who has been here for three and a half years, and I know regularly auditions for the status of senior Member of this House—[*Interruption.*] Well, he can shake his head, but I am telling him what his behaviour conveys to me. He is normally a good-natured fellow, but he is chuntering too much. His role—he is a PPS, I think?—is to fetch and carry notes and to nod in the appropriate places; he should remain silent.

**Neil Coyle:** On the people affected, is it not true that there is already a 300,000 backlog at the Home Office of people waiting for decisions even before EU citizens are added to that queue? Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister accused EU citizens working in and contributing to our country of queue-jumping? In cheerleading the end of freedom of movement, are not the Government sticking two fingers up at the 60 million British people who wish to travel and work in the 27 other EU member states and who will lose out under this Government's plans?

**Ms Abbott:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. As he says, there is already a backlog of people wishing to test this system. If I were on the Treasury Bench, I would be a little more humble about the possibilities of that system. This is about real people's lives, and businesses have concerns about how it will work.

In my lifetime, the thinking and public debate about migration has largely moved forward. It says something about that forward movement that the two people who face each other across the Dispatch Box this morning are both the children of migrants, even if they come from diametrically opposed political positions. The concern with the heated and toxic debate around Brexit and migration is that that general debate might go backwards, not forwards. Indeed, people who have seen the scenes outside the House of Commons this week and in the past would do well to be concerned about the possibility of that debate going backwards. We have seen unpleasant scenes and attacks on Members of Parliament going about their business, on journalists, and even a black policeman was abused by those Brexit campaigners. We

must be mindful to have a debate that moves forward and does not look back or excite passions, and that at all times acknowledges the important role that migration has played—and hopefully will continue to play—in building this country. In its efforts to pander to certain elements of the British electorate, the House at least must maintain a respectful and serious debate about migration.

On EU migrants, I repeat that from what we know about the immigration and nationality directorate from advice surgeries and individual case loads, there must be doubt about its capacity to process more than 3 million people speedily and efficiently. I remind the House of the concerns about security and the safety of the realm among stakeholders such as the former heads of MI6 and defence chiefs, and those in Brussels. I do not know whether Conservative Members have had occasion to go to Brussels and talk to stakeholders and commissioners, but if they have done so they will be aware of the very real concerns.

Whether on migration, EU migrants, or safety and security, Labour does not believe that this deal meets the tests we have set out. We regret that there has been such a huge break in this debate, but it has now resumed and Labour Members are saying that we will not be voting for the deal. It is wholly dishonest to say that the choice is between this deal or nothing—wholly dishonest. We will not vote for this deal. We believe that the country deserves better, and that the deal does not engage with the serious issues of security and migration that it needs to address. We will go through the Lobby to vote down this deal, and I only hope that those on the Treasury Bench have a plan B.

10.34 am

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): I agree very strongly with the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) in what she said about the tone of this debate, and I propose to say something about that. I also agree that this debate takes place as we approach a sombre and important moment in the history of our country. I must, however, take issue with her, respectfully, about the disappointingly inept intervention of Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie on the question of security. I have taken careful advice on what they said, and looked into it extremely carefully, and I believe that their intervention is not only incorrect, but also inappropriate. I deeply regret it.

We have known many worse times in this country, and some more dangerous times, but as the right hon. Lady rightly said, not since the war have this House and this Parliament faced a more important moment. It is incumbent on us, and it is our duty, to recover our sense of proportion, and restore some dignity, reason and calm to this debate, both inside and outside the House. I very strongly sense that the country is fed up with this debate and desperate for us to come to an agreement, and for their Parliament finally to rise to the occasion and see the country right. In my speech to this House on 6 December I made plain, and I do so again, that I was a staunch remainer, and I believe that our wonderful country has made an historically bad decision. I also believe very strongly that the decision that was made in the referendum of 2016 to leave the European Union must be honoured.

I am genuinely proud to speak in this debate as a Member of Parliament for 35 years, a Privy Counsellor, a former officer in the British Army, and a loyal servant and subject of the Queen. I say that because, like many other Members, I hate being regularly called a “traitor” in correspondence and elsewhere. It is necessary for the language surrounding this debate to calm down, and for more respect and dignity to govern our debate, not necessarily in this House, which should be, and is, robust, but particularly outside where, as the right hon. Lady rightly said, we have seen the most disgraceful behaviour towards Members of Parliament, journalists and especially—because we can take it—towards members of the public.

What we are discussing is but the beginning of a long journey. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said in a very good speech to wind up the debate the other night:

“The withdrawal agreement is the unavoidable gateway whether to a Canadian, a Norwegian or a Chequers destination”.—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 500.]

It is therefore essential that Parliament is not so wet and timid and lacking in will that it cannot find a sufficient consensus to move forward on this first step, and create the architecture and footings for future negotiations once we have become a third country.

I believe it would be quite wrong to postpone the article 50 deadline, and that the House must be prepared to earn the undying contempt of the country if it simply does not have the collective will, discipline and sense of duty to come to an agreement. The House has before it a sensible compromise agreement. Inevitably, it is not to everyone’s taste, but it has been drafted with the greatest care and agreed between all members of the European Union, in order to manage Britain’s exit from the EU with the least possible disruption, while allowing progress and further steps down the road to the good neighbourly relations that we all want in the very different future that lies ahead.

In my judgment, the outcome is plain and clear and staring us in the face, whatever might be our favourite solution. If the House votes against the one compromise proposal on the table, it will with absolute certainty be voting for chaos, with the outcome very likely to be the precise opposite of what it intended. I remind the House that this compromise is the only agreement on offer, and to try to reopen it risks losing even that. I therefore urge the House to take into account that our exit from the EU will take a long time, and I think we should be clearer and franker with the public. We cannot expect arrangements and institutions that have grown together side by side in the interests of all over 45 years, to be separated at one go without grievous damage to each side. It therefore remains my view that the Prime Minister’s plan has carefully and cleverly managed to try to separate Britain from the European Union—45 years of earnest combined endeavour and legislation—with, miraculously, minimal damage to both sides. We must keep it that way, for it is, if only we can grasp it, a golden prize given the circumstances. I must say to my right hon. and hon. Friends and to my many friends on the other side of the House that it would be extremely ill-judged to throw it away. It would, above all, be totally contrary to our national interest.

My late father, a former Member of this House and for a time the Leader of the other place, once said of these debates that if politics is the art of the possible,

[Sir Nicholas Soames]

the art of the statesman must be to make possible that which is necessary. It is my judgment from talking to colleagues on both sides of the House that the real national consensus is for the deal on the table, warts and all, if only we can get there. We should realise that this really should no longer be a party political matter. The public rightly expect us to work together across party lines to achieve a conclusion to this massive problem. Members should be able to see that this is a prospect toward which there can be a gradual advance, with the current compromise deal a good first step.

I conclude by saying again that I am deeply and genuinely sad that our extraordinary country has reached this sorry pass. I feel very strongly that we must not reject this agreement and thus descend into constitutional and, I am afraid, administrative chaos. I am very strongly against what would be a divisive, poisonous and hateful second referendum campaign, and I believe Parliament must do its duty here and now, and come to an agreement.

Let us agree among ourselves. This country is not an island on its own; it is a proud nation, whose success has always been derived from the wider world. Our history and geography have given us great advantages. Our language is the way the world communicates. Our capital is one of the greatest cities in the world, and people in every other international and domestic forum listen to the views of this country because of our great experience and expertise. We really should have the confidence to press on, to cease this appalling and pointless arguing, much of it on the head of a pin, and to preserve and enhance the cohesion, unity and stability of our country. We are a humane, liberal-minded, tolerant, moderate nation, so let us now push on with the task at hand and show our electors and the world the kind of spirit and judgment they rightly expect from us.

10.43 am

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful finally to get the chance to contribute to this debate. I am in a bit of an unusual position—I think I am speaking on day six of a five-day debate, which is a privilege not granted to many.

I appreciate the chance to remind the House of some of the reasons—only some of them, because we have only four hours left and others want to speak—why Scotland cannot and will not accept this deal or anything closely resembling it. For me and a great many of my fellow Scots, probably the most damaging and pernicious feature of this entire deal is the very thing the Prime Minister chose to list as its single biggest benefit. When she emailed all 650 MPs ahead of the original withdrawal agreement debate, what did she choose to put right at the top of her list of reasons for supporting the agreement? The fact that it would mean an end to the free movement of people.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department confirmed that today. Despite his protestations, there were howls of protest from Conservative Back Benchers when my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) made the same point yesterday. I find it astonishing that, given the Environment Secretary's comments yesterday, the party in government seems more concerned about the welfare and free movement

of racehorses than about the welfare and free movement of people. The Conservative party believes that ending the free movement of people is the best aspect of this deal. I beg to differ.

In fact, if end the free movement of people were all the agreement did, that in itself would be more than sufficient reason to consign it to the dustbin. I see young parents in my constituency in tears because the Scotland they have come to know and love as their home—the Scotland that made them so welcome—will not be allowed to give the same welcome to their families. I see our precious health and social care services, on which members of my family rely right now, plunged into crisis because the British Government are deliberately making it harder for them to recruit the staff they need. I see my home country, which is known throughout the world as one of the most welcoming and hospitable on the planet, being dragged into a mire of xenophobic, small-minded isolationism by a governing party that has been resoundingly rejected in every election my country has seen during my 58 years on planet Earth. When I see those things, the only response I can give with any kind of conscience is that I will resist the agreement with every cell in my body and for every second that I am granted to remain in this life.

If our people had been told the truth in 2014—if they had been told that the price of continuing to be governed from London would be being part of this vile policy—there would be 59 fewer Members of this Parliament and the national Parliament of Scotland would be exercising full sovereignty as a full partner member of the European Union family.

Members on both sides of the House should look themselves in the mirror and examine their consciences carefully. Is it not utterly despicable that some people set out in 2014 deliberately to target EU nationals, who had the right to vote in our referendum because that was the right thing to do, and say, “You’ve got to vote to be ruled by Westminster because otherwise your future as EU citizens in Scotland could be under threat,” but those EU nationals then saw the rights they enjoyed and expected their families to enjoy taken away from them as a result of a decision their home country voted against in a referendum they were banned from taking part in? I really wonder how some people in this place can sleep peacefully at night.

**Luke Graham:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point about the 2014 referendum. It is despicable when EU nationals’ rights are played with as a bargaining chip, so can he speak to the comment by the then Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, that 160,000 EU nationals in Scotland would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland if it did not get access to the European Union? There was no unilateral guarantee like the one the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have provided from Nicola Sturgeon then. Why is it okay for the Scottish National party to use EU nationals as bargaining chips but despicable of us to guarantee their rights?

**Peter Grant:** I say first to the hon. Gentleman that his Government refused point blank to give the immediate unilateral guarantees the Scottish Government asked for the day after the—[*Interruption.*] No, they refused point blank to do it. Nicola Sturgeon was pointing out to EU nationals in Scotland the danger of continuing to

have an immigration policy that was reserved to this place. She was not stating what would happen in the event that Scotland became independent; she was warning what might happen in the event that we did not. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the fears being expressed now by tens of thousands of people in Scotland are exactly the fears they were warned about by the then Deputy First Minister.

Let me remind the House of one of the boasts the hon. Gentleman made when he intervened on the shadow Home Secretary. Unless I am very mistaken, he boasted that he had fought to get his constituents passports. The Conservative party is proud of the fact that people who came here to live, work and contribute as a matter of right now have to seek the services of a Member of Parliament to fight to be given the passport that should be theirs as a matter of right. If the Conservatives think that is something to be proud of, that demonstrates once again how far their moral compass is from anything that could ever be accepted in Scotland.

That is only when we consider the moral and humanitarian arguments against what the British Government are seeking to impose on us. It would be bad enough for them to embark on such a regressive, socially divisive path if they thought that it would make us better off, but every one of their own analyses, of which there are quite a few—in fact, just about every credible analysis ever made of the economic impact of free movement of people—tells us that it is good for the host nations, and good for the peoples of the host nations.

The Government's own analysis shows that, no matter what Brexit scenario we end up with, ending free movement and slashing the rights of immigrants to come here on anything like the scale that they intend will damage our economy. So even if we subscribed to the Thatcherite gospel that there is no such thing as society, but just a collection of individuals—even if we followed that creed of “Let us look after ourselves, and to hell with everyone else”—ending free movement of people would still be the wrong thing to do. To subscribe to this Government's anti-immigration and anti-immigrant philosophy, we would not just need to be selfish; we would need to be out of our flaming heids.

On 19 December, during the final Prime Minister's Question Time of the year, I asked the Prime Minister to name one single tangible benefit that would compensate my constituents for the social and economic damage that we know ending free movement of people would cause. She could not give a single example. If the Home Secretary wants to listen, I will give him a chance to stand up and name one benefit to my constituents of ending free movement, but even if he were interested enough to listen, he would not be able to do so.

In fact, I will happily give way to any Conservative Member who wants to take the opportunity to answer the question that the Prime Minister dodged. None of them wants to do so. No Conservative Member can identify a single tangible benefit that my constituents will see. By their silence, the Conservatives are telling me that I cannot vote for this deal. By their silence, they are telling me that ending free movement of people is not good for my constituents—so how dare they ask me to support it?

The Prime Minister dodged the question, just as she and a succession of Ministers have dodged every difficult question that they have ever been asked during the

Brexit process. Indeed, the ongoing debacle over parliamentary scrutiny of this shambles demonstrates that we have not only a Prime Minister and a Government who have lost control, but a Prime Minister and a Government who will cynically play the card of parliamentary sovereignty when it suits them, but will use every trick in the book—and quite a few tricks that are not in the book—to try and stop us doing the job that we were elected to do. They spout their creed of parliamentary sovereignty sometimes, and at other times they do everything possible to undermine it.

They Government went to court to try to prevent Parliament from having any say in the triggering of article 50. They have whipped their own MPs—although not successfully in every case—to vote against allowing this debate even to happen. I have noted on every day of the debate that those who claim that allowing it to take place was an act of treason have not exactly been backward in coming forward and asking to join in at every opportunity. The Government abuse their privileged position in respect of setting parliamentary business to try to strip the meaningful vote of any actual meaning. Like bad-loser, spoilt-brat football managers the world over, they have even resorted to ganging up on the referee to complain and accuse him of cheating every time he gives an offside decision against them—and not just during the 90 regulation minutes of points of order on Wednesday; the Leader of the House even tried to do it again during a wee bit of penalty time yesterday morning.

The Government are mounting an intense campaign of what can only be described as misinformation to frighten Parliament, to frighten our citizens, to frighten businesses, to frighten everyone, into believing that they must accept this deal because it is the only possible deal and the only alternative is no deal. That is simply and palpably not true, and the Prime Minister knows it is not true. How can I be sure that the Prime Minister knows it is not true? Because she has said so herself on at least half a dozen occasions that I can trace. She has said it at the Dispatch Box, and she has said it in television interviews. She has told us that it is not a simple choice between her deal and no deal.

In an attempt to scare the no deal brigade in her own party, the Prime Minister was forced to admit that if her deal failed, Brexit might not have to happen. When I first saw that reported on the BBC website, I thought it must be a mistake, but if it was, it is a mistake that the Prime Minister has made nearly every day since then. Her clearly stated position is that we are not faced with a simple binary choice between her deal and no deal. We still have the option of keeping the deal that we already have. Staying where we are is always an option. The status quo is always available. The best of all possible deals is the deal that we have right now, and I must say to my colleagues and good friends on the Labour Benches that it is the only possible deal that meets their six tests of an acceptable Brexit. If they could only get their act together and accept that, between us we could stop this madness with absolute certainty.

Earlier this week, the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), in what I have to say was the most shambolic appearance before a Select Committee that I have ever seen, managed to walk into a trap and make an admission that he had been trying

[Peter Grant]

to avoid making throughout the meeting. It was a trap set—presumably by mistake—by one of his own fellow hardline Brexiteers. He was asked:

“Minister, would you agree that, by taking no deal off the table, it weakens our hand in negotiations with the EU?”

His reply was “I would, yes.” Members should think about that for a minute—apart from the slight technical point that there are no negotiations with the EU, because the deal has been done and the negotiations have finished.

Not only the Minister, but one of those hardline Brexiteers in the European Research Group, has admitted that the Government have it in their power to take no deal off the table. Why would they leave it on the table when they know, and everyone knows, that it is the worst possible outcome? Why would they try to force a situation in which it the only alternative, which is what they want us to believe? Why, in recent weeks, have they spent so much time and money telling businesses, trade unions, voluntary organisations and everyone else something that they know is not true?

Only the Government could answer those questions, but when it is put in the context of all the other shenanigans that they have been up to, it seems obvious what they are doing. They know that the Prime Minister’s deal has absolutely no chance of getting through the House on its own merits. In fact, I think most Ministers have known for months that as soon as the Prime Minister set her stupid red lines, there was no possibility of an acceptable deal that complied with those red lines, but instead of doing the right thing—instead of persuading the Prime Minister that she had to change her approach—they set out to try and pauchle the whole process. They were determined that the only vote we would ever have—the vote, remember, that they do not want us to have at all—would be rigged. They knew that the only good thing about the Prime Minister’s deal was that it was not quite as bad as no deal, so they set out to fabricate a situation in which they tried to tell us that no deal was the only alternative. That is why we have seen the Prime Minister’s almost Damascene conversion, virtually overnight, from “No deal is better than a bad deal”—which, by the way, is in the Conservative manifesto—to “Any bad deal is better than no deal”.

That is just one example of the hypocrisy and the double standards that we have seen from this Government, but perhaps the most brazen example of their double standards—and that is saying something—appeared in a tweet earlier this week.

**Ian Murray:** May I intervene briefly on the subject of double standards? The hon. Gentleman is advancing a powerful argument, and the right argument, that it is in Scotland’s interests to remain a member of the European Union, but will he please explain to the House—and to my constituents, and to the people who are watching the debate in Scotland—how he can advance that argument while at the same time advancing the opposite argument that Scotland should pull itself out of its closest and most important Union?

**Peter Grant:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman wants a debate on independence. I suggest that he should be patient, because that debate is coming, not because I want it and not because he wants it, but

because the people of Scotland are demanding it. The simple answer to his question, however, is that the nature of Scotland’s union with this place is fundamentally different from the nature of the partnership of the EU.

As I was saying, earlier this week, Glenn Campbell of the BBC—not Glen Campbell the Rhinestone Cowboy, in case Members are wondering—tweeted, after interviewing the Secretary of State for Scotland:

“Scottish secretary @DavidMundellDCT says if PM’s #Brexit deal is voted down he doesn’t see why MPs shouldn’t be asked to vote on it again once they’ve had time to reflect.”

The Secretary of State for Scotland does not see why, having asked MPs to vote on the deal once, the Government should not come back and try again once we have had time to reflect. So it is okay for Conservative MPs—that is who he is talking about—to be allowed to change their minds about the Prime Minister’s deal, and it is okay for Conservative MPs, as the Standing Orders allow them to do, at the end of this year to change their minds and have another go at removing the Prime Minister through another vote of no confidence, but it is not acceptable to allow the people to confirm whether they have changed their minds.

Returning to the intervention of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), at the same time that this Parliament and these nations are being presented with a choice of at least two futures, the people of Scotland are faced with a choice of two futures as well. It is not a choice that they wanted to be forced into and it is not a choice that we wanted them to be forced into: there was a majority vote to stay in the Union of the United Kingdom but there was a significantly bigger percentage majority vote to stay in the union of the EU. Through no fault of the people of Scotland, and against the expressed wishes of the people of Scotland and our national Parliament, we are being forced into a position where it is no longer possible to respect the results of both referendums, so the people of Scotland are going to have to decide which future they want: which of these two unions is more important to us?

Is it to be a true partnership of equals, which, as our friends in Ireland have seen, sees all other members show solidarity and support even for relatively small members of that partnership; or is it to be the so-called partnership where the powers of our Parliament are already being stripped back unilaterally by the British Government, as confirmed by Britain’s own Supreme Court? Do they value more a union that was forged by the desire of former mortal enemies to work together to sustain peace and prosperity across a continent, or a Union that was forged through bribery and corruption for—[*Interruption.*] Or a Union that was forged through bribery and corruption for the sole purpose of sustaining sectarian bigotry in the appointment of high offices of state? Do they give most importance to a union that has at its core the fundamental belief that the exchange of the free movement of people, the free exchange of talents and the free exchange of ideas benefits us all or one that denounces its citizens as queue jumpers and chooses to exploit them as bargaining chips? The exploitation of migrants as bargaining chips was not the policy of the Scottish Government; it was the stated policy of the colleague of the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) in the United Kingdom Government.

This Parliament faces a choice next week, and it must be a choice not between the Prime Minister's deal or no deal, but between the Prime Minister's Brexit or no Brexit. That is the choice this Parliament deserves and demands; that is the choice the people of these islands deserve and demand. The time is coming—and I think it will come a lot sooner than most in here expect—when at least one of the partners of this Union, and possibly more, will see a demand from its citizens to be given a further choice: do we want to remain part of a Union that tramples on the rights of our citizens and which treats us as a second-class nation, not as a partner, at every opportunity, or do we want to remain part of the most successful trading partnership and one of the most successful partnerships for peace—a partnership that even now has numerous other candidate members desperate to get into it? Again, I will give way if anyone on either side of the House—*[Interruption.]* We have a lot of countries trying to get into the EU, but nobody that has left the empire of the UK has ever asked to come back—nobody that has won their independence has ever asked to come back. I wonder why that might be.

We will be opposing this rotten deal next week not because we think no deal is an option, but because we want, and we demand, the alternative: to give Parliament the choice to say, “Is this the Brexit we expected?” and if not, “Don't do it.” We have to give that right to the people of these islands as well.

Nobody was elected to this Parliament in 2017 on a no-deal Brexit manifesto. Nobody voted for a no-deal Brexit in the referendum; that was not one of the options. This Parliament and this Government do not have the right to do anything that creates the danger of a no-deal Brexit without the explicit approval for such a course of action from the people of these islands. A Government who claim to respect the democracy of the people or the democracy of Parliament must not attempt to force the issue by effectively giving us a choice between “Would you like to voluntarily give us your money?” or “Would you like me to shoot you?” That is not an acceptable choice; it is anti-democratic. It is fundamentally wrong for the Government to seek to turn this into a choice between doing what the Prime Minister tells us or leaving without a deal.

Not leaving is still an option, and not leaving must continue to be an option, and we will continue to press the case to allow the people to decide whether they want to accept the Prime Minister's Brexit or, having seen what it really means—having seen the disastrous impact of the deal the Prime Minister has achieved—they want to decide that the best deal we can ever get is the deal we already have.

11.5 am

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I cannot help but reflect on the fact that the speech of the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) followed that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who called for calm and moderation in this debate. I am afraid that some of the language the hon. Gentleman used rather failed to rise to that challenge. For him now to call for a people's vote when he never for an instant accepted the result of the people's vote we have already had underlines the point about double standards raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray).

**Peter Grant** rose—

**Sir Bernard Jenkin:** No, I am not giving way; the hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time. But I will say this: like him, I believe in the sovereignty of the people, and in fact I believe in the sovereignty of the Scottish people, and the Scottish people spoke in 2014 and voted to be part of the United Kingdom. And then the Scottish people, as the British people, took part in the 2016 United Kingdom referendum and the British people spoke, and I believe in their sovereign right to be respected.

So I will rise to the hon. Gentleman's challenge and say that the benefits the Scottish people are getting from leaving the EU are that they are taking control of their own laws and money, and—something dear to his heart, I imagine—that the Scottish Parliament is going to have more power as a result of us leaving the EU. He seems to be very quiet about that.

In the emergency debate on Tuesday 11 December I emphasised the democratic legitimacy of the referendum vote. The Commons voted to give the decision to remain or leave to the voters by 544 votes to 53, and then we accepted that decision and invoked article 50 by 494 votes to 122.

Nobody could possibly question the courteous determination and sincerity of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has striven so hard to secure an agreement acceptable to this House from our EU partners, but it now looks most unlikely that this draft agreement will be approved, because it would leave the UK in a less certain and more invidious position than we are prepared to accept.

Nevertheless, the EU withdrawal Act, which sets the exit date as 29 March 2019, did pass this House. It could have included an amendment that the Act should not come into force without an article 50 withdrawal agreement, but we approved that Act, which provides for leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement—I think even my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex voted for that Act. Parliament has now spoken. The Act makes provision for the so-called “meaningful vote”, but not for any kind of vote in this House to prevent Brexit without a withdrawal agreement. Democracy has been served.

For some MPs now to complain that they did not intend to vote for what the Act provides for is rather lame. They may have held a different hope or expectation, but the Government gave no grounds for that. The Government always said, and still say, that no deal is better than a bad deal. Parliament has approved the law and set the date. There is no democratic case for changing it, nor could that be in the national interest.

The right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) reminded us of some of the less pleasant elements on the spectrum of British politics, but elsewhere in the EU, extremism is becoming far more entrenched than here, with AFD in Germany and the gilets jaunes on the streets of Paris, as well as Lega Nord, which has actually taken power in Italy. Popular revolt against the immovability of the established EU consensus in the rest of the EU cannot be blamed on Brexit. On the contrary, our broad and largely two-party democracy has proved to be the most durable and resistant to extremism because we absorb and reflect the effects of political and economic shocks.

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

UKIP died at the 2017 general election because both the main parties pledged to implement the referendum decision without qualification.

But what are some in this House trying to achieve now? What would be the consequences for the stability and security of our democracy if the Government let the politicians turn on the majority of their own voters and say, “The politicians are taking back control, not for Parliament but to keep the EU in control”? The voters did not vote to accept whatever deal the EU was prepared to offer. They voted to leave, whether or not the EU gave us permission. Ruling out leaving without a withdrawal agreement is not a democratic option. They did not vote to remain as the only alternative to a bad deal, they did not vote for the EU to hold the UK hostage, nor did they vote for a second referendum.

Of course, a second referendum is what the EU really wants, which is why it will not give the UK a good deal. It is shameful that so many leading political figures from our country have been shipping themselves over to Brussels to tell the EU not to make concessions in the negotiations with their own Government, in order to try to get a second referendum. The EU is a profoundly undemocratic and unaccountable institution, whose biggest project, the euro, has inflicted far worse disaster on businesses, individuals and families in many countries than even the direst Treasury forecasts for the UK. The economic and political storm clouds are still just gathering over the EU. It is the EU that is on the cliff edge of disaster, not the UK. In the years to come, in the words of Mervyn King, the former Governor of the Bank of England:

“If you give people a chart of British GDP and ask them to point to where we left the EU, they won’t be able to see it.”

Our domestic policies, as well as our trade with the rest of the world, have already become far more important than our present trading relationship with the EU. We will have the freedom to develop them more quickly. Our EU membership does not just cost the net contribution of £10 billion per year and rising, which does no more than avoid some £5.3 billion of tariffs, but it has locked the UK into an EU trading advantage, leaving the UK with an EU trade deficit of £90 billion a year. Why are we trying to preserve such a disadvantageous trading relationship?

Even if we leave without a withdrawal agreement, there will be immediate benefits. WTO is a safer haven than the backstop. Far from crashing out, we would be cashing in. We would keep £39 billion, which would immediately improve our balance of payments and could be invested in public services, distributed in tax cuts or used to speed up economic adaptation. That would boost GDP by 2% over the next few years. We would end uncertainty; the draft agreement would perpetuate it.

Business needs clarity about trading conditions with the EU from day one. Jamie Dimon of J. P. Morgan campaigned for remain, side by side with George Osborne, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. J. P. Morgan now says that extending article 50 is the “worst case scenario” because it does

“not see what it provides us in reaching a clear, final outcome that provides certainty for businesses”.

It adds that paralysis is

“not good for the economy”,

yet that is what the article 50 extenders are arguing for. We will not be caught in any backstop if we leave without a withdrawal agreement, nor will there be a hard border in Ireland. Even Leo Varadkar has said that

“under no circumstances will there be a border. Full stop.”

The EU and the UK Government have said the same.

All of the more ludicrous scare stories are being disproved. There will be no queues at Dover or Calais. The president of Port Boulogne Calais could not have been more emphatic—[*Laughter.*] Labour Members laugh, because they do not want to hear the truth. The president of Port Boulogne Calais said:

“We have been preparing for No Deal for a year... We will be ready... We will not check trucks more than we are doing today... We will not stop and ask more than we are doing today”.

He added that the new special area for sanitary and phytosanitary checks was somewhere else, and would “not influence the traffic in Dover.”

The Government and the pharma companies say that they can guarantee supplies of medicines, and the EU Commission has proposed visa-free travel for UK citizens in the EU for up to six months of the year. The EU statement of 19 December already proposes its own transition period of up to nine months, including no disruption of central bank clearing, a new air services agreement, access to the EU for UK road haulage operators and special regulations on customs declarations.

Leaving on WTO terms is far preferable to the protracted uncertainty of either extending article 50 or this unacceptable withdrawal agreement. The leadership of this country—that includes the Government and the Opposition—should stop reinforcing weakness and start talking up our strengths and building up our confidence. History has proved that our country can always rise to the challenge, and our people will never forgive the politicians who allow the EU to inflict defeat. It saddens me greatly that even some in my own party are promoting such a defeat.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My apologies for interrupting, but I wonder whether you could indicate whether you are likely to introduce a time limit on speeches during the course of today’s proceedings, and tell us what it might be. That would allow us to start thinking about how to contain our speeches.

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is that I will be imposing a time limit very soon. I am making a judgment about it, but it is likely to be of the order of six minutes.

11.16 am

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Few debates in this House have ever had such an impact on the people of Liverpool Wavertree and on the country as the one we are conducting this week. Every home, every business and every citizen in Liverpool will feel the impact of Brexit. The stakes could not be higher for jobs, the price of our goods, wages, the cost of mortgages, businesses large and small, our economy and our standing in the world. It is hard to see what has changed since the Prime Minister delayed the meaningful vote in such a discourteous fashion before the Christmas recess. The only tangible change is that the hands of the clock have

moved ever closer to the Brexit deadline, with the Prime Minister presenting her false choice of her deal or no deal. She should tread carefully.

There are those who wish to see Britain crash out of the EU without a deal in place, as the final act in their anti-EU drama. No responsible Government should even entertain the prospect of a no deal Brexit, and it is beyond belief that that option has not been ruled out, given the uncertainty that it is creating across our country and the billions being spent in preparation for that possibility. We should be crystal clear about what a no-deal Brexit would mean for our constituents and the country, including for our food prices given that 30% of our food supplies come from the European Union. Our gas and electricity prices would also increase disproportionately, having an impact on the poorest and most vulnerable, as about 5% of our electricity and as much as 12% of our gas is imported from the EU.

With no alternative currently in place, our constituents will no longer be covered by the European health insurance card, and will need to pay for health insurance when they go abroad. The manufacturing sector that I represent in my constituency will be hard hit, with firms relying on just-in-time production unable to properly guarantee their production. I have heard from many of my constituents, including Rob, the owner of a small chemicals business, who would struggle to source raw materials or maintain the same level of sales. He is an employer, and many of my constituents rely on jobs in his firm.

Worst of all, our public services, including the national health service and social care, would suffer as we would be unable to recruit from countries within the EU. In the Select Committee on Health and Social Care, we heard that there is a real threat to medical supplies. The permanent secretary at the Department for Health and Social Care told us that he was having sleepless nights over the continuation of imports of vital medical supplies, and that the issue was very complex.

In Liverpool, we are proud of our universities, and we have welcomed students and academics from across the EU. Our university leaders tell us that crashing out of the EU is one of the biggest threats to our higher education sector. The Russell Group reported just last week that postgraduate student enrolment from EU countries has already fallen by 9% this academic year, starving our universities of cash. More than 100 universities have warned of an academic, cultural and scientific setback from which it would take decades to recover, because a no-deal Brexit would isolate and hobble Britain's universities.

Those are the things that we can predict with confidence, but the real threat comes from the unintended consequences—the 1,001 things that we cannot foresee that will have a negative impact on our citizens' lives. The bottom line is that things will be worse for most of the people we represent. That is the reality that we are contemplating in this debate. Our politics is broken and our system has failed, and neither the Prime Minister's deal nor the no-deal scenario has the support of a majority in this House. Our Parliament is in a state of gridlock, so how can we break it? The Prime Minister could draw a magical rabbit from the hat—a political masterstroke of some kind—that breaks the logjam and enables Parliament to move ahead beyond the current paralysis. While we live in hope, the chances of that happening appear incredibly slim.

The opposition to the Prime Minister's deal is about more than the backstop on the Northern Ireland border, critical though that is. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for analysing the debate that was abruptly brought to a close before Christmas. He found that Members from across the House had many concerns about security, migration, citizens' rights, and trade and the economy, which was the No. 1 issue. However, the backstop, on which we are told this whole debate rests, came fourth.

**Mike Gapes:** As somebody who was involved in negotiating the Good Friday agreement, I regard the backstop as an essential guarantee of that agreement and of long-term stability in Ireland. Although I disagree with the Government's position for the reasons that my hon. Friend is setting out, the backstop is not the problem. The problem is with the future framework and other things.

**Luciana Berger:** I thank my hon. Friend for articulating clearly that, although the nub of the issue has rested on this point, there are actually many other issues. For many colleagues on both sides of the House, the backstop is not the issue that is consuming them. In *The Daily Telegraph* this morning, an unnamed Minister said that the Prime Minister is likely to lose by 200 votes next week because the situation will not be resolved by addressing the backstop alone. If the vote is lost next Tuesday, a motion of no confidence in this Government should be brought immediately, and we should see whether there is a majority in Parliament for a general election. With fewer than 80 days to go until we are due to leave the EU—around 40 sitting days—time is pressing.

If the vote falls next week, we will break the gridlock only by giving the country a final say with a people's vote, but that does not mean a rerun of the 2016 referendum. The world is a different place nearly three years on. Some 1.4 million young people who are eligible to vote today were too young to have their say in 2016, and the most recent analysis shows that 72.5% of my constituents now support remaining in the European Union, with 74% of people wanting a people's vote. Those percentages are hardly surprising, because Liverpool is proudly a European city. We were the European city of culture in 2008—a year that generated an economic impact of £753 million. In just the past five years, European structural and investment funds have provided Liverpool with nearly £200 million, which has allowed us to invest in hundreds of local enterprises and jobs. People understand the enormous benefits that EU membership has afforded us for decades, and it is regrettable that the Government will not even confirm that funds that the European Union has already committed to Liverpool to the tune of millions of pounds will be guaranteed post Brexit.

Young people, whose lives will be most affected by the decisions taken in this place, should be allowed a say on their future. New facts have come to light. The lies of the leave campaign have been exposed, including, as the House heard earlier from the Home Secretary, the leaflets and Facebook advertising that people were bombarded with telling them that millions of people would come here from Turkey. That was just not true. We have heard strong suggestions of Russian influence in our referendum in line with Russia's desire to disrupt and weaken the

[Luciana Berger]

western allies, and it is deplorable that we have not yet seen a full and proper criminal investigation. Rather than the unicorns and rainbows that too many of the public were sold, we now have a much clearer sense of what Brexit actually means for our economy, for jobs, for our public services and for businesses, and public opinion has shifted based on the harsh realities rather than the false, shiny promises on the side of a bus or threats of a Turkish invasion.

Let the people have a say with a people's vote. Let us be open and honest with the country: there is no better Brexit. There will be no Brexit dividend, just Brexit chaos and misery. There is no better deal than the one we have already. On every analysis, Government receipts will be lower than if we had remained in the European Union. Of course, we could choose to spend money differently, but that is not a dividend. The decision will affect us for decades to come, and it is in the national interest and for the sake of the people of Liverpool, Wavertree, who sent me to this Parliament, that I will vote against the Government's motion next week.

11.25 am

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this historically important debate. While there are many varying and strongly held views on both sides of the House about the Prime Minister's proposed deal, all right hon. and hon. Members can agree that the votes we will cast next Tuesday will in all probability be the most important votes that any of us will ever cast in our political lifetime.

On a personal note, I have known my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) for some 20 years. He and I come at this issue from utterly different perspectives. I was an infantryman and he was a cavalryman, and anyone who would call him a traitor has clearly never met him. In fact, the idea that Churchill's grandson could be such a thing is clearly ludicrous. I say to anyone who would be foolish enough to repeat that ridiculous assertion that, in the immortal words of our Defence Secretary, they should go away and shut up.

I entered this House some 18 years ago. I made my maiden speech on 4 July 2001, and I spoke against the treaty of Nice on the principle that I might as well start as I mean to go on. While I cannot claim anything like the 40-year record of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I can at least say that I have been fairly consistent on European matters stretching back nearly two decades. In 2008, I served as shadow Europe Minister, reporting to the shadow Foreign Secretary, William Hague, when we debated the Lisbon treaty. As his number two, it was my duty to debate much of the hard detail of that 300-page treaty. I remember it well as we spent 40 nights doing it. Despite that extensive debate, night after night, it soon became apparent that the House of Commons could not change so much as a single punctuation mark in the treaty. The Commons had effectively been completely neutered, and it is that experience that finally convinced me that we would one day have to leave the European Union.

Next Tuesday, we will be voting on two documents. The first is the political declaration. It is full of warm words but, as we are all aware, it is completely meaningless

legally and has no force whatsoever in international law. It is the equivalent of, "I promise I will respect you in the morning," but it is in no way enforceable. In stark contrast, the withdrawal agreement is a 585-page draft international treaty which, if this House were to approve it, would become binding on this country in international law. I read the Lisbon treaty cover to cover, and I can assure the House that I have read the withdrawal agreement, too. Having done so, and knowing what is in it, I am utterly determined to vote against it, so I will briefly explain why.

First, we will not take back control of our money. Under the proposed agreement, the UK has agreed to pay the EU approximately £39 billion. The methodology for this is laid out in part 5 of the agreement, on financial provisions, specifically articles 133 to 157. In short, we will pay that £39 billion without any guarantees in return. With this country having just been through a period of considerable austerity I cannot justify to my constituents paying such a huge sum of money without at least some binding guarantees about the nature of the future relationship we would get in return. This is all in stark contrast to Margaret Thatcher at Fontainebleau in 1984, when rather than give up £39 billion for nothing, she famously said, "I want my money back". And she got it when she won the so-called British rebate, which has saved this country tens of billions of pounds ever since. Would that we had negotiated with equal resolve in this instance!

Secondly, we are not taking back control of our laws. Under the draft agreement, the UK would remain bound by EU laws in several critical areas, such as social policy, employment policy, environmental policy and customs. We would effectively become a rule taker, which means we would have to continue to obey EU laws in these areas, having surrendered any influence over how they are drafted.

Thirdly, we could be locked into a customs union without the ability to leave. This is the so-called Irish backstop, contained in the Ireland-Northern Ireland protocol on pages 301 to 475 of the agreement. In short, if we enter the backstop, we enter a customs union, despite having clearly pledged in our manifesto not to do so, and that would materially constrain our ability to sign international trade deals with other countries, including the United States, our single largest trading partner in the world.

Moreover, as the Attorney General's legal advice has made crystal clear, having entered the backstop, we could leave only with the consent of the EU. This has often been referred to in the House as the "Hotel California" dilemma—in other words, you can check out, but you can never leave.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): Check in.

**Mr Francois**: No, check out.

I have seen the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire), but unfortunately it in no way affects the wording of the withdrawal agreement, which, as a treaty, would override it, so the provisions in his well-intentioned amendment are unfortunately, in practice, legally naive.

Fourthly, we risk undermining the integrity of the UK. The Government have told us repeatedly that they would never even contemplate creating a border down

the Irish sea. Despite this, not only have they contemplated it; they have legislated for it in writing, because the agreement in the protocol creates internal borders within the UK, whereby Northern Ireland would become a rule taker in further areas, such as goods, agricultural products and VAT. This is one of the most compelling reasons why the DUP have said repeatedly that they will vote against this toxic withdrawal agreement, and I am 100% with them.

We should also remember that treating Northern Ireland differently threatens to break up the integrity of the UK. We know, from the excellent article written recently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), that the secretary-general of the European Commission, Martin Selmayr, has said that losing Northern Ireland is “the price of Brexit”. I cannot possibly pay that price or contemplate the break-up of the UK or anything that would encourage further separatism in Scotland. For that reason, too, I will vote against the deal.

Lastly, the agreement would ultimately be overseen by the European Court of Justice. Article 174 of the agreement, on page 286, envisages a situation in which both sides cannot agree on aspects of its implementation. In this case, they would create an arbitration panel to resolve the dispute, and the article clearly states that the European Court of Justice, where the matter affects Union law, which is very wide-ranging, would be the ultimate arbiter. It would decide the question and its rulings

“shall be binding on the arbitration panel.”

That would override this Parliament and our Supreme Court.

It has often been argued that my colleagues and I on the European Research Group do not want a deal. That is not true. We want a deal, but not this deal. What we want is often referred to as the super-Canada option, because it takes an existing EU-Canada free trade agreement, signed by the EU in 2016, and amends it into a more comprehensive free trade agreement by which we could trade equitably with the EU but outside the single market, the customs union and the ECJ. Under such an arrangement, we would really have left the EU. I want to make it absolutely clear that that, and not no deal, is our desired end state.

In summary, I hope that everyone who votes on this agreement on Tuesday night will be able to look their constituents firmly in the eye and say they have read it. It seems to me that as professional legislators that is the least we can do. The British people voted in a referendum to leave the EU by a majority of more than 1 million votes, and I believe that we as parliamentarians have a moral obligation to follow their instruction, but this agreement does not do that. It would leave us in effect hanging half in, half out of the EU, which is something that the Prime Minister specifically warned against in her excellent speech at Lancaster House in 2017.

Moreover, the agreement, if we were to approve it, would involve us giving up £39 billion for nothing, leave us as a rule taker, potentially lead us into a backstop from which there is no escape, threaten the break-up of the UK, and still leave us under the suzerainty of the ECJ. We would be a vassal state. This country has never bowed the knee to anyone in almost 1,000 years and I do not believe we should start now. I have read this.

This is the best deal since Munich. This House of Commons has been told by *The Telegraph* and *The Sun* that this is a surrender document. It is. We in this House have never surrendered to anyone, and we never ever will, including next Tuesday night.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. As foreshadowed some moments ago in my response to the point of order from the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), I can now announce the imposition, with immediate effect, of a six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

11.37 am

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I do not recall a time when the fractured state of our politics so accurately mirrored that of our nation. Brexit demanded so much more of us in this place. It was brand-new territory, and for it we needed a brand-new approach to how we did our debating and politics, but these proposals for consensus building across party boundaries were rejected by the Government. The vacuum left in British politics, as MPs and parties have struggled to respond, has been filled by a racist and divisive rhetoric that is creating an inward, nationalist and isolationist environment.

We have been left with an angry country. People are angry because we are leaving the EU or because they want out and it is taking too long, but most of all they are angry with us, even though, in large part, regardless of what political party we are in, whether we are leavers or remainers, we are genuinely trying to do the right thing by our constituents and our country. I campaigned for remain, believing it to be in the best interests of my constituents and my country, but neither agreed with me. In the initial aftermath, I was in denial. I fell into the trap of repeating the mantra that people did not know what they were voting for, they were lied to and they misunderstood the implications of their decisions. While there was some element of truth in that, it was far more nuanced, because complex decisions and human motivation are never so simplistic.

I knew that from people such as my dad—a decent, kind and hard-working man, a retired welder from the shipyards. He and his mates were not angry at economic migrants who had crossed the channel from Europe to work alongside them; they were angry with the Government and institutions that exploited those migrants by allowing the undercutting of wages. That led to him and thousands of others losing their jobs. None of us should ever underestimate the impact that unemployment on this scale can have on individuals, their families and their communities. These scars are irrevocable. That was when disillusion set in. Freedom of movement and the single market were not problems for my dad and his mates. It was about Governments that allowed unemployment to shatter families and communities, Governments that used the EU as a handy repository for blame whenever they failed people; Governments that for decades made no effort to tell anybody the ways in which the EU was a “good thing” and then wondered why they could not get across the message in a few weeks; and Governments that left people behind and created chasms in our communities. These are the people constituents such as mine had in mind when they voted to leave.

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

I trust the people who sent me to Parliament. In a representative democracy, it is my job to do what I think is best for the people who elected me, unless they have already made their opinions on the subject perfectly plain. They have and over the past two years they have not changed their minds about leaving, so it is now up to me to see that they get what they want. It is my job to thrash these things out in Parliament. That is why I voted to trigger article 50 and why I stood on a manifesto that promised to respect the outcome. We should leave, but I do not want us to leave in this way—not with this deal. I am not convinced that a second referendum would solve the impasse. My constituents tell me that they find it a strange concept: a democratic way of overturning a previous and also democratic decision, which in turn supplanted the democratic decision taken 40 years earlier. I also fear that such a referendum will delay the inevitable and we will be right back to where we are now, trying to find a deal that works for all. I do not accept that the choices on offer are as binary as accepting this deal or crashing out. There is another option: an extension to article 50, giving us the space, albeit a small timeframe, to do our politics differently, to restore our country's faith in this place and to show people that we really are working together. Crucially, for that to happen there needs to be a marked difference in the rhetoric and actions coming from this Government and the Prime Minister. If we continue to fail to deliver the mandate we have been given by the British people, what little trust remains in politics and politicians will surely evaporate.

11.42 am

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I very much agree with colleagues who have made remarks about the tone of the national debate. I was stalked by a woman of mature years in the last general election and it got so bad that it was only through police intervention that my campaign, such as it was, was not totally derailed. She did not like my views, which the House is about to hear.

When the result of the referendum was announced, I was elated and surprised. I never wanted us to join the European Union in the first place; I felt that de Gaulle had done us a favour in originally refusing our membership. When we eventually joined, I thought we were always on the back foot. I voted accordingly in the first referendum, when my personal view was roundly defeated. The result of the 2016 referendum was a dream come true and a moment of liberation, shared by the majority of my constituents. Two years on, I am heartily sick of the word “Brexit”—who invented it? I am also less than pleased with the way we have gone about the process of leaving the EU. Like all of us in this Chamber, I love my country—the United Kingdom. There are a number of reasons why I cannot support this agreement, one of which being that it threatens the integrity of the UK.

I am not interested in what happens on the Opposition Benches, but I am very interested in what goes on in my party, so I shall address my remarks to those on my side of the House. I cannot express forcefully enough how disappointed and even angry I am at the whole process and the way it has been handled in the past two years. A former Prime Minister, David Cameron, gave us the opportunity to vote in the referendum in the first place

and he should have seen it through to the end. We ended up with a new leader, and it has transpired that the three senior members of the Government were all on the remain side, which is not an ideal situation. We then called a general election. I have been a candidate 10 or 11 times, and this was the worst general election campaign I have ever been involved in. It resulted in 33 of our colleagues losing their seats and the Conservative party losing our majority—again, that is not an ideal situation to have halfway through the negotiation process.

I, in common with most Members of the House, have had no input into the terms of the negotiations. We were told at the outset that no running commentary would be given, but there certainly has been and I have been hugely excluded from this process. This agreement is not a political solution; it has been put together and agreed by unelected people, and the resignation of not one but two Brexit Secretaries says it all. I was particularly struck by the strictures of my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) on leaving office, when he said:

“I cannot reconcile the terms of the proposed deal with the promises we made to the country in our manifesto at the last election.”

We should never have agreed the terms of the negotiation in the first place; fancy giving away £39 billion before we have actually started the process.

The continent of Europe confronts a growing crisis which could yet cause the collapse of the EU. In this country, unemployment stands at 4.1%, its lowest level since 1975, which contrasts with the position in Spain and Italy. Italy's national debt is €2.5 trillion and the country is heading towards bankruptcy. Greece's membership of the eurozone has wiped out businesses, jobs and entire industries there. In Malta, someone was murdered because they were investigating corruption. In Romania and Bulgaria, corruption flourishes. If we look at France, we see that 10 people have been murdered there. In Germany, social democracy is on the wane. In Belgium, the Prime Minister resigned before Christmas because of chronic unemployment. If colleagues want to know more about this, they should read the excellent article by Peter Osborne.

A recent report by my former colleague Lord Lilley and his co-author, the general secretary of Labour Leave, made 30 points about leaving on WTO terms. I believe the points dealt more than adequately with Project Fear and I absolutely support what they said. As Sir Rocco Forte said in a recent article,

“inward investment into the UK in the first half of 2018 was the second highest in the world after China, but ahead of the US and Germany.”

For me, the vote to leave was fundamentally about opportunity: the opportunity to set our own laws; the opportunity to embrace global free trade; and the opportunity to forge our own path in the world once again. From the start, the Government have not fully embraced those opportunities or attempted to understand them, and this agreement reflects that failure. This so-called “deal” most certainly does not match up to the expectations of the millions who voted to leave the EU, and I cannot and will not support it. But regardless of what decision this House comes to in the vote at the end of the debate, I will be leaving the European Union at 11 pm on 29 March, and I am delighted to be doing so.

11.47 am

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I will be voting against this deal. Based on the substantial number of my constituents who have contacted me about this vote, it seems I will be doing so with their overwhelming support—nearly 95% of them have urged me to vote against. We are now a month on from when this vote should have taken place—a month that has achieved nothing, much like the last 932 days since the narrow outcome of the referendum. It was an advisory referendum, not a binding one. It was a referendum that disenfranchised more than 4 million people, one in which no 16 or 17-year-old was allowed to vote and no EU citizens living here and working here—they are part of the fabric of this country and society—were allowed to vote. The ballot asked just one question—whether to remain or leave. It did not ask how we should leave, nor what should happen afterwards.

And 932 days on, we now know, because we have facts, that the referendum was drenched in illegality by both the Vote Leave and the Leave.EU campaigns. We know that electoral law was broken, that campaign spending limits were breached and that impermissible foreign donations came through online platforms. We have those facts from the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner, and, following the work of those regulators, investigative journalists and our Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which has spent a year painstakingly investigating widespread evidence, the National Crime Agency is investigating Arron Banks, the largest political donor in UK history, and senior figures of the Leave.EU campaign, because there are reasonable grounds to suspect that Banks was not the true source of £8 million in funding to the Leave.EU campaign. That is important—it should not be dismissed as sour grapes—because it raises really serious concerns, which this Government have deliberately chosen to ignore, about the legality and the validity of the referendum outcome.

I voted against triggering article 50. In my speech in that debate, I said that the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, had behaved recklessly in his approach to the reform negotiations at the EU, and that he was

“a man who put himself and his party before the national interest, and who gambled our country’s safety, future prosperity and long-standing European and wider international relationships to save his party and his premiership from imploding”.—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 895.]

He failed miserably.

Two years on, I regret to say that those words, and those actions, can equally be applied to the current Prime Minister. This whole period has been an exercise in how not to negotiate. Of all the ironies, yesterday’s desperate phone calls by the Prime Minister to some trade union leaders—who are professional, expert negotiators from whom she could have learned so much—were the first contact she has made with them.

**Ms Abbott:** Does my hon. Friend share my surprise that it has taken two and a half years for this Government to reach out to trade unionists and other key stakeholders?

**Jo Stevens:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend: it is astonishing. The refusal to work not just with the TUC and the unions but with Opposition Members to develop a negotiating strategy that would

secure a deal in the interests of the whole of the UK and each of our four constituent nations has been grossly negligent. The strategy has not been one of strong leadership. Stubbornness and failure to listen and to engage are the hallmarks of weak leadership, and they have led this country into this complete mess.

The best course of action for the country’s future stability, economy and security would, of course, be to revoke article 50. I suspect that there are very many colleagues across the House who would privately accept that but who do not feel that they could openly commit to supporting revocation at the moment. However, there is no majority in this House or the country for no deal. In the absence of that, or a general election and change of Government, the right course of action must be to ask the electorate what they now think. I know that is what the majority of my constituents want, in the absence of revoking article 50. Nearly 90% of those who have contacted me have told me that. I know this because I have been asking them for their views since 2016, and they have been giving them to me. Every published poll in the past six months also confirms that.

People are allowed to change their minds. The referendum result in 2016 was not a result in perpetuity. In the words of one of the Government’s former Brexit Ministers: “It’s not a democracy if you can’t change your mind.” In Wales, we would never have had devolution and the creation of the National Assembly had we not had a second referendum, in which people did change their minds.

I will finish on this point. All the irresponsible, dangerous and inflammatory talk that we have heard in recent months about civil unrest, riots and treachery if we vote down this deal next week and have a people’s vote has to stop. Every time I come into this Chamber, I look at Jo’s shield and think of her bravery and determination during her time here, and what she must have faced in those final moments confronted by extreme right-wing violence. We cannot allow a small minority of fascist thugs to undermine our democracy. They are using Brexit for the advancement of their far-right ideology, and we all have to oppose it.

In the vote next week, each of us will make our own judgment as to what is right in the interests of our constituents and our country. I am very clear about what I feel is right, and I will vote against this deal.

11.54 am

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): I certainly support the hon. Lady on one thing and that is on thugs. Throughout my political career, both in the House and in local government, there have been right and left-wing thugs, and some of them are beyond imagination, especially in the dark corners of some of the inner-city areas in which I have worked.

For further safety, I need to declare a number of interests: I am a very part-time dentist, a member of the National Farmers Union, and an ethnic minority immigrant holding dual nationality. Unlike those on the Front Benches, I am the immigrant.

In the referendum, I voted to remain in spite of growing discomfort over the EU’s progressive political integration, but I have changed. As the negotiations have gone on, the EU appears to have moved closer to unity. It was a great relief to me that we did not join

[*Sir Paul Beresford*]

the euro. That was brought home to me by someone who had visited the visitors' centre at the European Parliament and informed me that there was a plaque that said:

“National sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our times.”

It then goes on to say:

“The only final remedy for this evil is the federal union of the peoples.”

Marx lives.

As I have said, I voted remain and lost. I accept the vote and am fully committed to the UK leaving the EU with a reasonable compromise deal. I say that because, having been a Minister many years ago who negotiated with the Europeans, I can say that they are tough negotiators, but then, too, so are we. We always ended up, to some measure, with a compromise. Those colleagues who say that we should go back and demand this or that are really away with the pixies. I expect a response from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) with whom I agree to disagree on many things, including on this particular issue. The thought that the EU and the 27 will roll over to the demand of colleagues on either side of the House after two and a half years of tough negotiations beggars belief.

Like all colleagues, I listened and talked to my constituents, or, rather, mostly, they talked to me. They have moved, too, especially the business people. They are saying, “Get on with it. What are you doing in the House of Commons? Stop it and get on with it.”

As I have mentioned, I belong to the NFU. Over the past few weeks, my local NFU members, in classic farmer speak—and there is a classic farmer speak—have been asking, “What are you lot mucking about with in Westminster?” Some of these families have farms here and in France. Many, if not most, export their agricultural products to Europe. All whom I have spoken to want us to take this deal and move on. Their livelihoods depend on trade, as do those of my Mole Valley manufacturers.

An additional factor raised by manufacturers and farmers is the relief that is felt over the new attitude appearing on immigration. I arrived in the UK under a work permit as a needed professional and spent a considerable time working in London in the national health service. Many of my doctor and dentist colleagues from New Zealand and Australia did the same, but when we went into the EU, or the Common Market, that flow stopped. The importance of that was brought home to me a couple of years ago when I ran an Otago University alumni dinner—Otago is my old university—in the Members' Dining Room. About 30 medical, dental and other distinguished academics from the university flew over from the United States and Canada. They pointed out to me that huge numbers of New Zealand and Australian academics, doctors and dentists in America would have preferred to come here, and they may do so in the future if these new immigration approaches happen. But, as ever, one of my farmers had the last word. He said that, in recognising skills, we need to accept the many forms. Considering my background—I left a very large sheep farm in New Zealand, which now, after lambing, has 50,000 sheep—it is clear why I was caught

and amused by his remark. He said to me that we used to like New Zealand and Australian sheep shearers coming to this country to shear our sheep. Does sheep shearing, I ask the Home Secretary, count as a skill?

I am backing this deal. I hope that we will wake up, grab the deal next week and move forward, because we have spent too long negotiating and too long waiting for it to happen.

11.59 am

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It will come as no surprise to anyone, I am sure, to hear that I will not support the deal. I am determined to do everything I can to secure a people's vote, with the option to stay in the EU and exit from Brexit. After all, that is what I was elected to do when I overturned a Tory majority of nearly 10,000 with the help of a progressive alliance of voters from across the entire political spectrum. I am still regularly stopped in the streets by constituents who just want an end to this mess. One lady said to me the other day, “I didn't vote for this Brexit. Please make it stop!” Is not that the refrain we are hearing from everyone—“Make it stop”?

That is my issue with the deal. The Prime Minister's deal has only 26 pages about what comes next. It will take years to get that right. Meanwhile, the fact that the air has been sucked out of this Government and the economy will continue to suffocate society. The very causes of Brexit—inequality, injustice, the incomprehension of parents that their children's future will not be as bright as theirs—will continue to be ignored until this is over. We have to be honest with people: Brexit will not solve any of those issues.

There is only one way to make this stop, and that is a democratic exit from Brexit. Support for that, as much as many in this House are trying to ignore it, is growing. Poll after poll shows that the will of the people has changed since 2016. Add to that Russian interference, Cambridge Analytica, the leave campaign being fined for breaking electoral law and dodgy DUP donations, and is it any wonder that people are dismayed? Does that surprise us at all? In a democracy, as has been said, people should be able to change their mind. If they want to vote for this deal, let them, but if they want an exit from it and to keep the deal we already have, let them have that.

One group that Brexit affects more than anyone else is EU citizens in the UK. These people are our friends. They have built relationships and careers in this country. They deserve so much better than this shambles. Is it not shameful that they are being asked to pay £65 to continue to live in their own homes and stay in their jobs? Although I welcome the announcements of Oxford University and my local NHS trusts that they will pay the fee for their staff, it beggars belief that they even have to offer. How much public taxpayer money has been offered to overcome the charge? That suggests to me that the Government should scrap it now.

Furthermore, what of British citizens who live in the EU? We have to think of them too. Above all, this affects young people—people like my younger brother and sister, who both live in Berlin. One is a scientist and the other an artist. They grew up understanding that they would be able to seek jobs elsewhere. That is being snatched from them by leaving.

On our NHS, 21% of the nurses and health visitors in Oxfordshire are EU citizens. My constituent, Jill, emailed me to say:

“Nobody voted for Brexit to have fewer nurses on our wards, fewer doctors in our surgeries.”

We know from our trusts that that is already happening. I agree with Jill. We would be far better off staying in and welcoming those workers with open arms.

I have two universities in my constituency, at least partially: Oxford University and Oxford Brookes. Both have expressed serious concerns about the impact of Brexit. Stuart, a professor at one of those universities, emailed me to say:

“In this department, we have been advertising lecturing jobs for the first time since the Brexit referendum. We were hoping to attract a French mathematician to one of these jobs, but when we contacted her, she made it clear that it wasn’t even an option, because she didn’t want to leave the EU.”

Instead of feeling welcome in our university towns and cities, some of the most saleable people in the world are being put off. While Brexiters may well have had enough of experts, Oxford West and Abingdon most certainly has not.

MPs across this House must now ask themselves if the deal brought forward by the Prime Minister is better than the deal we already have. If they vote for it, they have to be able to look each and every constituent in the eye and say that that is true, and if they cannot do so, they need to give them that choice. The EU has been utterly clear that this deal is the only deal on the table—let us not make that mistake—and it should be up to the people to decide whether or not they want to accept that deal.

We should recognise, however, that this is about much more than that. It is about Britain’s place in the world—our outlook and our identity as individuals and communities. I support a people’s vote because I support an open Britain that wants to engage with the world more, not one that closes itself off.

12.6 pm

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): Mr Speaker, thank you for calling me. I have sat through nearly 12 hours of debate in the past two days, and I have to say that I think yesterday there was a decisive shift in the mood of the Chamber overall.

I was a marginal remainder, but when I told my constituents that—this is perhaps illustrative of the influence I have had in the past 30 years—they voted 60:40 out. Having done that, I said, “I am absolutely with you. It is my duty to get you out.” I feel very strongly that we must respect what our constituents have told us; we cannot have it any other way. Some colleagues who do not do so will find themselves in some difficulty when their finance and general purposes committees or associations look at them as we approach the next general election. I see myself as a delegate, not a representative, on this.

Mr Speaker, you and the Prime Minister have at least one thing in common—stamina. You have been in the Chair for the whole time this debate has gone so, which is 16 hours this week up to today, and the Prime Minister has been at the Dispatch Box for a very long time on Brexit issues, too.

I should declare an interest that I most definitely do not have: I do not want a job. However, I have to tell the House that I am a long-standing supporter of the Prime Minister. I respect her for her integrity and determination. She was a very good Home Secretary—that Department is a bed of nails—as well as a good Minister before that and a good councillor in Morden before that. She got a better deal than I expected. I am not sure I expected her to come back with an end of free movement, our money and laws back, and zero tariffs. I think that she has satisfied the requirements of my constituency, and I also think it is perfectly reasonable to have some red lines.

Yesterday, I listened to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs demolish the Opposition’s case, with their 16 different positions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) explained that the European Union institutions will stop functioning in March because of the electoral cycle. We are therefore really faced with two options: we either take the deal on offer or we fall out of the EU. The pun is intended, because we will drop right out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) said, a lot of people are saying, “Get on with it”; they want us to do it.

In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), who has 9,000 car workers, explained the problems of the supply chain, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). I have to tell the House that in my Hinckley and Bosworth constituency we make things. It has the largest supplier of tractors worldwide, Caterpillar, with sales of \$45 billion—the first UK factory was set up in Hinckley in 1952, and it now has over 1,500 employees—and 72% of its inbound components come from the EU, while 31% of outbound sales go to the EU. JJ Churchill, a supplier of Rolls-Royce, is in my constituency: fans are assembled into engine parts. I am told that there are dire problems if we do not have proper arrangements for leaving. MIRA, with its autonomous vehicles technology, is also in my constituency, as is DPD, the biggest parcel sorting operation in Europe, which has a depot the size of 14 football pitches and ships 80,000 items per hour, 20% of which go to the EU.

We have heard a lot about WTO terms from my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). They should have been here to listen to the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) demolish the argument for leaving on WTO terms, pointing out that he worked as part of the WTO during the Doha round and has therefore seen for himself the weakness of its dispute resolution process and the way in which the Americans ignore it.

We have three critical problems: the World Trade Organisation option does not work; just-in-time is critical because we do not have warehousing capacity; and agriculture would be ruined with 73% tariffs. Many colleagues support this argument, including the hon. Members for Redcar (Anna Turley) and for Leigh (Jo Platt) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), who have said that they are worried about the situation.

On the backstop, colleagues should listen to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), who is supporting the Government on Brexit. She has warned

[David Tredinnick]

of the dangers facing Northern Ireland's businesses and agriculture, and we know that that is also true for agriculture in England. The Democratic Unionists should be careful what they wish for because there is the possibility of a border poll. The biggest problem for Northern Ireland will not so much be a hard border, which is impossible to construct and enforce but the catastrophic effect on its businesses.

I am supporting this deal, and I believe that there will be conciliation if we do not get it through on Tuesday. The hon. Members for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) all spoke about conciliation. There will be some form of conciliation and we will get it through in the end.

12.12 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Seventy-seven days to go and breaking up is hard to do—disentangling ourselves from 45 years of arrangements that touch every aspect of our lives. This is bigger than any piece of legislation, any Budget and anything that any of us has ever voted on. It is a big deal. This is existential stuff.

I will not be voting for this deal because it is the culmination of a string of calamities. This week I received 373 emails in one day asking me to oppose it. People cannot understand why we had the referendum at all. We then had the triggering of article 50 with no plan. Holding a general election in that timeframe did not work out very well either, did it? The abandoned vote of last year then added another 30 days of wasted time. Now we have this bastardised compromise before us, uniting a whole pile of departed ex-Ministers, every living former Prime Minister, the ideological purists of the ERG and every single Labour Member here today.

Never mind the backstop, my constituents—13,000 outraged EU nationals among them—are worried about their financial passporting rights or their carbon credits when the EU emissions trading scheme ends. We are now told not to make the perfect the enemy of the good. That is a mighty big downgrade from “the easiest deal in history”. It is a bit of a downgrade from, “They need us more than we need them.” But there is plenty of material for any student essay on “Can a minority Government ever behave like an autocracy?”

There are desperate measures from No. 10, including evenings of drinky-poops for Tory MPs and knighthoods for some. A meeting was even offered to the 218 cross-party MPs imploring the PM to rule out a catastrophic no-deal Brexit, which would be like jumping out of a plane with no parachute, without even a safe landing space. That is one in three of us who are concerned about just-in-time supply chains and rules of origin. Indeed, I ended up at that meeting myself. Alas, nothing new came from the Prime Minister—same old, same old. There comes a time when being resolute becomes being pig-headed and stubborn. Meanwhile we see the farcical scenes of a multi-million-pound ferry contract paid to a firm with no vessels. We see the stockpiling of drugs. We have become the biggest buyer of fridges—that is one thing we can revel in.

**Layla Moran:** Does the hon. Lady think it is farcical that it was revealed that we have spent £1 million on these fridges so far?

**Dr Huq:** I absolutely do. In fact, we must think of all the money that this is racking up—never mind the £39 billion just for the split.

We have seen the no-deal notices, one of them recommending that Britons should vary their diets to avoid bananas and tomatoes in future. There are 3,500 troops on standby. Our great nation has descended into a “Dad’s Army”-style farce. “Just getting on with it” is easier said done when all the “it” that we should be getting on with is so interconnected.

Last year, in the sixth-richest country on earth, we saw 600 deaths from homelessness, including one here on our very doorstep. We know from the UN report on extreme poverty that 14 million of our fellow citizens are in extreme poverty. The NHS is haemorrhaging EU staff. Hoarding insulin is now a thing—that never used to be the case. The Home Secretary has left now, but desperate people being washed up in dinghies on our shores underlines the need for international co-operation at a time when we are turning away from our neighbours. We have heard about the coarsened climate of “them and us”, not only “them” as the EU and “us” on this side, but in this debate—the leavers and the remainers.

As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) pointed out, Brexit has cost us dear from the public purse. We have two new Departments, Brexit planning across the entire civil service, and costly experiments creating a dress rehearsal with motorways in Kent. That is even before we get to the £39 billion that perplexes some Conservative Members. Every Government analysis shows that this will contract our economy by 9%. The best deal, obviously, is the one that we already have as existing members with a seat at the table rather than paying out to remain aligned. We know that what was promised was always improbable; now we know that those outlandish policies were undeliverable and the process was illegal.

As D-day looms, we need a plan B to break this logjam, impasse, gridlock, deadlock, cul de sac. We must have the meaningful vote that has been so hard resisted by the Government so as to reassert the sovereignty of Parliament. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your role in changing the relations between the legislature and the Executive as you have done. We all thank you for that—although it was nothing to do with the Conservatives; they resisted every drop of it.

The last thing we need now is a blackmail Brexit with guns held to our heads. Increasingly, by the end of last year, good will, as well as time, was in decreasing supply. We have all this parliamentary game-playing when the functioning of our country, and people’s lives and livelihoods, is at stake. Given the magnitude of all this, it is time for calm action. We need a fresh assessment of the will of the people. It is 2019 now, not the middle of 2016, when circumstances were so different. Trump had not even been elected then, and it feels like he has been there for 50 years already.

We should extend article 50, given that there is only one deal on the table. As we have heard, “Nous n’allons pas renégocier le deal.” They have said it to us in every language. So that one deal has to be put to the people—to

the electorate—for endorsement as to whether they think it is a good one. What are the Government scared of? We need a people's vote with the option to remain, as we know what that looks like—to remain and reform, because we know it could be better. Now that is what I call taking back control.

12.18 pm

**Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Twenty years ago, the euro came into being. I led the campaign to resist the UK joining the euro. The slogan of the no campaign that we launched was “Europe yes, euro no”. I believed then, and continue to believe, that the UK's best position was to be in the market but outside the eurozone, and indeed the country prospered over that 20-year period.

I was also a very strong supporter of the referendum. I played a leading role in the referendum campaign of Conservatives In, and I worked closely with the then Prime Minister. But immediately after the result came in I accepted it, recognising that it was narrow but nevertheless decisive and that it was our duty to implement and honour the decision. I believe that the Prime Minister's deal does that in a pragmatic manner that recognises that the result was narrow, that the subsequent general election did not produce a decisive result, that the country is divided, and that businesses have significant concerns about the implications of our leaving the EU. I regret that the spirit of pragmatism, which should be embraced by more Members in this House, has become lost in the debate over the past few weeks and months.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** The right hon. Gentleman said that the general election did not produce a definitive result and the country is divided, but the two main parties both went into the general election saying that they would respect the outcome of the referendum.

**Nick Herbert:** That is absolutely the case, and I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Two groups of Members of this House oppose the withdrawal agreement, and the irony is that they want exactly the opposite things. Both groups cannot be right, and therefore they are both taking a considerable risk. One group wants less Brexit—perhaps a softer Brexit, or even no Brexit at all. Many of those hon. Members support what is revealingly and euphemistically now called the “people's vote”. Perhaps scarred by the experience of the referendum campaign, I strongly reject the idea that a second referendum is the way to settle this argument. Why should people pay any attention to the result of a second referendum if we ignore the first? I think the whole process would cause delay and further division. The worst possible outcome—and it would be very likely—is that we end up with a result that is just as narrow, or narrower in one way or another in favour of either leave or remain than we had before, and the issue would not be settled at all.

Those hon. Members who now seek to delay, dilute or even ditch Brexit voted for the referendum. They voted, mostly, to trigger article 50, and they stood behind their manifestos, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. That group are taking a significant risk, because in legislating to trigger article 50 the House set the country on a track, a course, and a timetabled process of exit that means that the default position is leaving without a deal. Hon. Members who seek to oppose the withdrawal agreement because they want less Brexit, or no Brexit,

believe that is what they can achieve, but they might not be right. They are therefore risking no deal, and they have crocodile tears in doing so. So many things that are now lamented were foreseeable. The article 50 process was foreseeable and warned of during the referendum campaign. So were the positions of Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and indeed the Union.

The second group of hon. Members who oppose this deal want exactly the opposite thing. They want a harder Brexit, or no deal at all, and they do not believe that it is necessary to have a transition period. I think they are wrong, and that the uncertainty, the potential disruption, and the cost of moving to a World Trade Organisation system would be damaging. Although some of the risks are overstated, I do not think they are risks we should take. I speak as a former police Minister who was involved for a short time in dealing with the potential impact of the fuel protests. That experience was very sobering, just as it sobered my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) when he was in charge of such matters. I think that group undervalue the importance of striking a deal with our largest single market, with which we do half our trade, and they are oblivious to the fact that leaving with no deal would be a huge act of protectionism. After all, if WTO rules are so good, why seek trade deals with anybody at all?

Importantly, the group who oppose the withdrawal agreement because really they want no deal at all are also taking a risk. As we have seen in recent votes, the Commons could prevent no deal and take control, and we could end up with Brexit being diluted, delayed or even ditched. That group have mounted various attacks on the deal, and provided various rationalisations for opposing it, including most of all the backstop. Those objections are so much more theological than they are practical, and it has become not just a question of whether it is likely that we will be trapped in the backstop, but the fact that we could be becomes the fount of all opposition to the withdrawal agreement. There is a blurring of the withdrawal agreement with the future relationship and the possibility of doing a trade deal. It is that end state we should be concerned about. By then, we will have removed ourselves with a sensible transition period and will be able to control our borders, our laws and our money, yet that end state is often described as if it will mean we are a permanent vassal state.

Campaigners on both sides exacerbate division. The no-deal side does so by fetishising betrayal and telling everybody that they are being let down, there are traitors and so on. The people's vote side does so by encouraging people to believe that this process can be stopped when, less than three years ago, the public voted to leave and, in truth, there has been little movement in public opinion. Opposition has descended mostly to pejorative attack. I say to hon. Members on both sides: “Prepare to climb down, because both of you cannot be right—one of you is not going to get what you want.” The right thing to do is to support a pragmatic exit, which is what the withdrawal agreement offers.

12.25 pm

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I had hoped to speak before Christmas. Given that there is not a scintilla of difference between what we

[Neil Coyle]

have now and what we had then, I am unsure what has been achieved in the meantime. In bringing forward the vote in this way and at this point, the Government have continued the trend that was set in the run-up to and throughout the 2016 referendum campaign. People have talked about improving the tone of debate, but we got to this position through betrayal, deceit and lies writ large on a bus, and through corruption and criminality that is still under investigation.

Since the referendum, we have seen the Government squirm and battle against any and every attempt by the House to uphold its role and scrutinise plans, including by trying to deny us a vote at all by pulling it at the last minute in December. Now, they have made the “meaningful vote” meaningless by presenting a Hobson’s choice of this deal or no deal, both of which the public and employers alike oppose.

Sadly, I have already seen damage in my community since the referendum. I have even shown constituents around this place—most recently Aaron—who have been laid off as a consequence of the result. Southwark has a strong food and drink sector, and strong hotels and hospitality, universities, arts and creative industries, construction and architecture, finance and law, healthcare and public services. All those sectors have alerted me to problems, especially with the retention and recruitment of staff. Locally, not one sector or employer has said anything would get better if the Government won the vote on Tuesday. The Government’s own analysis shows the longer-term national damage that would be caused if Brexit went ahead, which would cost £100 billion.

I am proud to represent Bermondsey and Old Southwark, and I know I speak for local people, 73% of whom voted remain and an estimated 80% of whom now support remaining. I voted against triggering article 50, knowing I did so with the support of the vast majority of my constituents and of local party members, who, sadly, have often felt unrepresented by the national party.

Turning back to the Government, since the Prime Minister published her proposals, two constituents have been in touch to say they back them, and thousands have been in touch to say they oppose them and oppose Brexit. People are sick of the deceit, but it continues. There is the deceit that there is a deal. There is not—nothing is settled. Even if the Government won on Tuesday, the only certainty would be more uncertainty. There is the deceit that this is a meaningful vote, despite our not knowing what the deal will deliver or even when, if ever, it will finally be agreed. It could take years to finalise trade arrangements, with more employers moving investment, staff and assets outside the UK in the interim, as we have already seen, including in my constituency.

There was deceit in Brexiteers promising the “exact same benefits” of EU membership, which they have utterly failed to deliver. They now more openly admit opposing freedom of movement. They take pride in insulting the 11,000 people who live in, work in and contribute to my vibrant community but were born in other EU member states, whom they accuse of somehow jumping a queue. They also ignore the 100,000-plus other constituents I have who want the chance to live, work, study and holiday across the EU for free but now

face losing out. UK citizens face a £300 million bill to continue travelling as they do to countries that are currently free to enter. And there was deceit in our being told that everything would be fully negotiated and other trade deals would be arranged ahead of our departure. It is not, and they have not been.

We need to inject honesty into this debate and be honest with the electorate. The UK has the most flexible membership package in the EU, with no Schengen membership, a rebate and no euro. The cost of our full membership, per capita and as a percentage of GDP, is among the lowest of all member states and less than some non-members, such as Norway, contribute for less control and fewer benefits. We must return to honest debate.

People are rightly fed up of the lies and deceit, including the idea that the Government’s arrangements uphold their commitment fully to protect the integrity of the UK. In fact, they put our country’s very future at risk and thoroughly undermine our international standing, with the empty rhetoric of “global Britain” pleasing only Putin and Trump, who have no interest in a strong and unified United Kingdom.

Finally, it is a fundamental falsehood, deceit and insult to present no deal as the only outcome if the Government are defeated. It is not. For years people were told that they could not have the things that they need: a police service able to investigate and solve crime, a national health service that did not involve 20-week waits for standard appointments, and a solution to the housing crisis. The Government’s response was that there was no money and no deal. Now they find billions to waste on the no-deal Brexit, while people still suffer “neglexit” on housing, policing and the NHS. With this fundamentally fraudulent claim, the Prime Minister is playing Russian roulette with people’s livelihoods and jobs. The UK can and should revoke article 50, and I urge the Government to take that approach.

In 2016, when she was Home Secretary, the Prime Minister wrote that

“it is clearly in our national interest to remain”

in the European Union, on economic and security grounds. Now she claims the exact opposite. The public see through that bluff, and the question that they are left with is this: what kind of leader attempts to downgrade their own country’s economy and security? My community was attacked in June 2017 at London Bridge and Borough market, and in no circumstances will I support the downgrading of security. Furthermore, what kind of leader throws away the country’s relationship with the strongest and wealthiest trade bloc on the planet, which covers half our trade and dominates vast swathes of our economy, especially services?

I was elected to this place in 2015 on a promise that I would never vote for anything that would harm my community. Brexit has done, can do, and will only do that. so I will keep my promise: I will oppose this limbo wish list, and support a new people’s vote. The truth is that we should all be bold enough to do our job. None of us were elected to downgrade our constituents’ prospects, to downgrade our country or its security, or to downgrade opportunities for the people whom we serve. We should all have the courage to end the deceit and dump this dismal downgrade.

12.31 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Let me return the House to the heart of this debate, which I believe is about our British democracy.

I remember being handed a badge saying “Keep Britain in Europe” way back in 1975, at the time of the referendum called by the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. I am sure you will recall, Mr Speaker, that his “new deal” led our nation to vote to remain in what was then believed to be a “common market”. The generation of the time, including my own parents, genuinely thought that it would promote trade and prosperity, while bringing peoples and nations of a troubled continent together in peace and co-operation. To most people it all sounded perfectly reasonable, and given that many had lived through the war years and then faced the prospect of a cold war with Soviet Russia, I can see exactly why they chose to stay in the Common Market.

Ever since then, however—ever since 5 June 1975—as each day has passed, the scales have surely dropped from the eyes of the British people as they have witnessed power being gradually drained from the sovereign nations of Europe by one treaty after another. They saw the Single European Act and then Maastricht, followed by Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon, all slowly but surely transferring power and authority to the institutions of the European Union.

It cannot be denied that the British people have a fine instinct. We can see when something is not right. However passive we may seem, eventually the people of these islands always wake up to the truth, and having done so, we have never flinched and capitulated throughout our entire history. Instead, we have stood our ground, raised the banner high and defended what is ours, and in the referendum on 23 June 2016, 41 years after the original referendum, the British people did exactly that.

The people of this nation are not unreasonable folk. They gave the Common Market and the European Union a chance, they truly did. They gave the EU a chance to prove itself to be an organisation where we, an island people with an unparalleled history as an independent, seafaring, trading nation, with a global outreach like no other and with nearly 1,000 years of being the masters of our own destiny, could feel at home; but it was not to be.

It wasn't like we didn't try. We were not in the EU for just a few months or a few years; we have been fully part of it for nearly half a century, and after all that time our people—the people whom we owe so much as their elected representatives here in this House—decided that they no longer trusted this EU institution and freely chose to get out. They chose to leave and to take charge of their own destiny again. Moreover, they did so with the greatest democratic vote the nation has ever seen, with the winning leave side securing wins in about two thirds of the constituencies of this very House in which we sit.

It was this Parliament that gave the British people the right to make the decision; it was this Parliament that voted through the referendum Act, which delegated this decision to the British people themselves. We said it was a once-in-a-generation decision, and that we would respect their vote and it would be final. So I say to colleagues in all parts of the Chamber and to everyone, both leave and remain, that if this Parliament now fails

to follow through on the solemn promise we gave—if we fail to truly uphold and respect the will of the British people, and if we show contempt for British democracy and break faith with our electors—I fear we shall be unleashing a collapse of trust in our democracy the like of which we have not seen in our political lifetimes. Our duty must surely be to our nation and its people. In my constituency almost 70% of the people of Romford voted to exit the European Union, and I can tell the House that they have not changed their minds and will not change their minds.

I truly believe our nation is up for this, and whatever the challenges we may face—whatever Chicken Licken-style panic occurs and despite all the fearful threats of doom and gloom just around the corner—the British people have the strength and resilience that will see us through, and nothing will tempt us to adopt the kind of retreat that some are sadly and shamefully advocating, try as they might.

I can do no better than quote the words of the late, great parliamentarian Peter Shore, who said:

“When the people feel they are being made subject to laws in which they have played no part and taxes to which they have never consented, respect for both law and government is undermined. Our tradition for order and peaceful change is based not only on the character of our own people but on an enduring, if tacit, bargain between Government and governed that the former will play fair”.—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1972; Vol. 831, c. 301.]

We must play fair with the British people and deliver a Brexit.

12.37 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell).

As elsewhere, the people of Warwick and Leamington remain extremely concerned about this crisis the country now faces. Like others, I came into Parliament to work to make our society more equal and to make lives better through a stronger economy. I therefore cannot vote for any deal that will lead to people being worse off, and I have to say this deal would lead to that.

We were told over a year ago by the Prime Minister that nothing had changed. Certainly in the past month nothing has changed. The Prime Minister is still in place, despite the efforts of a great many in this House. A month on from when I was due to make my speech before the vote on 11 December, nothing has changed: there are no reassurances, and no re-reassurances; there is nothing in writing and no changes to the Prime Minister's deal—and let us be clear, it is the Prime Minister's deal.

Two and a half years on from the referendum, we learn that the Prime Minister has made her first phone calls to union leaders. We heard on Wednesday that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) had not once in the last two and a half years had contact from the Prime Minister, and nor had the Leader of the Opposition. It has also been revealed that, disappointingly, there has been a Government strategy to marginalise Parliament, first by claiming that analysis did not exist and then by limiting MPs' access to the Government's economic impact studies showing the economic damage that would be wrought not just by no deal but all other deals.

[*Matt Western*]

The process of Brexit has also shown that for nearly all this time the Prime Minister has worked as some kind of rogue negotiator in parallel to the Brexit Secretary of the day. Evidence of that came to light with the Chequers deal, which the Prime Minister shared with her Cabinet colleagues just hours beforehand—apparently the Brexit Secretary was blissfully unaware of the details. There was also evidence of that in the Prime Minister's disastrous general election campaign when she failed to collaborate with Cabinet colleagues. We are now witnessing once more her autocratic tendencies.

These past few months have seen Parliament being subjected to what can only be described as relentless verbal waterboarding. The Prime Minister tells us all that it is either her deal or no deal. This week's Brexit Secretary tells us it is her deal or no deal, and so it goes on. This is not debate, and it is not leadership either. Sadly, it is the Prime Minister's failure to utilise the talents on her own Benches or to engage those of us across the Floor that has caused this impasse. That was brought into sharp focus on Tuesday evening when the Prime Minister finally met MPs of all parties to hear our views on why no deal was not an option. I thank her for meeting us, but why did she not consider doing that 18 months ago?

Two months ago, I attended an event here hosted by the Japanese embassy. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Secretary of State for Transport were also in attendance, along with many others. If anyone here was present that evening, they will recall the speech made by the chair of the Japanese chamber of commerce. His words were chilling. He said that his member companies would act with purpose to protect their investments. That is natural, but let this country be under no illusion: there are 1,000 Japanese companies with major investments here in the UK employing 150,000 people. They are here because they sought and want continued open access to the European market and European talent.

The Government are playing the ultimate game of brinkmanship, running down the clock and seeking to force Parliament to accept the deal. We are not seeing the Government taking back control. The harsh reality of the global economy is that many UK companies own foreign businesses and vice versa. Just yesterday, we heard from Ford and Jaguar Land Rover about the pressures that they face from the downturn in the global economy.

I mention that because I fear more than anything the social and economic damage that will be caused by leaving the EU's customs union and the single market, neither of which is covered by the withdrawal agreement. If businesses needed any reason to divest from the UK, Brexit and particularly a no-deal outcome will provide it. Since the referendum was called, international companies will have been actively reviewing their UK investments and evaluating the risks. Now, this is all being brought into sharp focus by what is happening globally, primarily as a result of the downturn in the Chinese economy. As I said, job cuts at Jaguar Land Rover were announced just yesterday.

The "Project Fear" of 2016 was misdirected. I am talking about what I see as "Project Reality" and how Brexit will ultimately impact on UK manufacturing—not

today, this year or in the next five years, but certainly in the next 10. It is worth reminding people of the statement made by the economic liberal Professor Patrick Minford, who claims that any loss of manufacturing in the UK will be a price worth paying for leaving Europe. Universities, too, will be hard hit. We are seeing a decline in the number of EU students applying for graduate and PhD courses in the UK; it is down 9% on last year.

Had the situation not been so serious—this is surely a national crisis—and had the Government not been in the death throes of their final negotiation with Europe, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister would be no longer. Two days after she pulled the meaningful vote, she was facing a leadership contest. We are running out of time. That is why I was pleased to support the amendment tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) to accelerate the next steps of the process. We have to move on from the vote next week and consider all the other options. The clock is ticking, and the Prime Minister knows it. Autocratic government is not what is needed in a time of crisis. Her deal must be voted down. As an exercise in negotiation—including drawing up red lines right at the beginning declaring what she did not want out of the deal—it has been an abject failure. We must let Parliament take back control of this process and ensure that the people are represented and all options are urgently considered, then let the best deal be put to the public against the option of remaining in Europe. But let us also be clear that no deal is absolutely not an option.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. After the next speaker, the time limit will have to be reduced to five minutes.

12.43 pm

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I agree with my comrade the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) that this deal must be voted down, although I am slightly surprised that he described the 2017 general election as disastrous, given that he came into the House as a result of it.

Despite this debate, I am positive about Brexit. The process of delivering it has been an unmitigated disaster, but as a consequence of the vote, I think it will ultimately be a very positive thing. I might be opening myself up to ridicule by comparing Brexit with the year 2000 debate and all the furore surrounding the possibility of aeroplanes crashing out of the skies and the world stopping rotating. There are echoes of that—we will remember the complexity of the process, but I do not believe that we will look back and see Brexit and what occurs thereafter as a disaster.

The Prime Minister repeatedly says, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." It therefore follows that if everything has not been agreed, nothing has been agreed. The past two years have, been at best, frittered away and, at worst, a monumental waste of time—a distraction from a clean Brexit. I feel let down by Parliament, by the Government and by the Prime Minister. The roots of the problem predate the Parliaments of 2015 and 2017, dating back to the '70s and the 1975 referendum. Parliament chose to go down the referendum route again because we collectively abdicated responsibility for making the decision. However, now that the public

have made a decision, we say that we want to dabble with it. There are two conflicting mandates: that of the referendum and that of the majority of Members in this House. Parliament cannot have its cake and eat it. It cannot ask the public for a view and then ignore it. It cannot abdicate responsibility for providing leadership on a question and then question the result. It cannot fail to provide the arguments behind a referendum and then say that the referendum failed to provide the arguments and a plan.

There appears to be a settled view in this House that the Prime Minister's plan is fundamentally flawed, but there is no single plan that this House would approve. The agreement is so fundamentally flawed that it is unamendable. The backstop must go, European Court of Justice involvement must go, we must be able to agree new trade deals, and we certainly do not want to hand over £39 billion. To be frank, I have lost trust in the Prime Minister's ability to negotiate a good deal—one that respects the vote of the people. The default position on leaving has always been to move to WTO rules. While not my preferred option, it is a better option than what the Prime Minister has negotiated.

Colleagues will have taken soundings on Brexit, and I have been surprised at how supportive my constituents have been. Indeed, that has led me to question what other colleagues say, because few people support the plan. I carried out an online poll—indicative, not representative—and only 14% of my constituents support the Prime Minister's plan. When I spoke to my local Conservative members, one or two supported the deal, but the clear majority did not. However, we may underestimate the situation, because some people go quiet. People with supportive views may come forward, but those with unsupportive views do not.

However, in blocking the deal by voting against it I feel that I am representing my constituents. I was heckled earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who said, in a menacing tone, "Your predecessor is looking down on you." The late Sir Teddy Taylor would have wanted the result to be respected on 29 March, and we should look with great admiration at his career and those of others who have followed him. We should stand firm on what they knew they were campaigning for and on what the British public knew they were voting for. We can be an independent nation state again. Let us not get too bogged down in the short-term detail and process. The outcome can be a great one: the United Kingdom as an independent nation state.

12.48 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge). I recognise the sincerity of his remarks even though I disagree with his conclusions. To be clear, I campaigned for and voted remain, and the remain vote in my borough of Tower Hamlets was 67%. I have received many emails since the vote. Some call for no deal, and some support the Prime Minister's deal, but the majority are for another referendum, which of course is code for reversing the original decision. Some colleagues on my side have said that nothing has changed since the Government pulled the vote in December. I disagree. If they had pressed the vote last month, I suspect I would have voted against, but now I am not so

sure, for a number of reasons. First, time is running out. Yes, the Prime Minister has run down the clock; there is no denying that. Secondly, amendments have been tabled such as amendment (p) on workers' rights, consumer protection and environmental standards, submitted by several of my right hon. and hon. Friends, which I have signed. Thirdly, I supported new clause 7 to the Finance Bill on Tuesday, and having demonstrated that I did not want a no-deal conclusion, I feel I should address what I do want, not just what I am against.

My party's policy is to call for a general election, and if and when there is a vote of no confidence, I will support it, but our first problem will be drafting a united manifesto. We would also need to delay article 50 and restart negotiations. This could mean months or years in Brussels followed by what? Another referendum perhaps. The amount of time, energy and money we have already spent on Brexit could be duplicated. What has happened this week, outside on College Green and inside this Chamber on Wednesday during points of order, shows just how toxic this issue has become, and it has to end.

We need to make a decision, move the country on and move forward. The impact of the doldrums and uncertainty is undermining business and the economy. Many colleagues have quoted dire forecasts for one course or another, but doing nothing could be just as bad. I have had real disagreements on this at home with family, friends, members of my party and constituents. Labour's six tests were useful as a challenge, but they, like Gordon Brown's five tests for the euro, were never meant to be met, in my view. Those judgments are fully subjective.

On the Northern Ireland question, I listened carefully to the intervention from the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on Wednesday, as I am sure did other colleagues, in support of the Good Friday agreement and the Prime Minister's deal. It is very easy to use hindsight to point out that which might have been done better. After the referendum, and especially post the 2017 general election, the Government might have detoxified some of this issue if they had constructed a cross-party approach to the negotiations. Part of Wednesday's debate focused on cross-party co-operation. There must be scope for a cross-party approach, as so powerfully argued for by the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) earlier this morning.

Our separation from the EU has been described as a divorce after nearly 50 years. Divorces are horrible. I have been through one. There is pain and there are costs. Then we have the playground politics of those who thought—and still think—this would be easy and pain-free. They are deluded, as the Father of the House described on Wednesday. Over 17 million people voted leave, and it was a national referendum, not a referendum in Poplar and Limehouse, not in Tower Hamlets, not even London. The Labour manifesto in 2017, which my constituents voted for, said we respected the outcome of the referendum. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday repeated that Labour would negotiate a better Brexit deal but that we would be leaving.

In conclusion, colleagues may have discerned from my comments that I am talking myself into supporting the Prime Minister's deal next Tuesday, against no deal and against further delay. I am not quite there yet, but I am not far away. It seems the House is not yet there at

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

all, but at some point we need to recognise that the danger of no deal is still there and that the only real alternative on the table is the Prime Minister's deal.

12.52 pm

**Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): It is an honour to speak after the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (*Jim Fitzpatrick*), who has been on a journey similar to mine, but from a different direction and a much longer one. If there is anything I can say to convince him to cross over the line and completely support the agreement, I hope I can say it in this debate.

I rise to speak in support of the withdrawal agreement, and it has been a journey for me. I was not here when the House voted for the referendum, I was not here when it voted to trigger article 50 and I did not campaign for either side during the referendum, but I did vote leave, and I knew what I was doing. Contrary to what Opposition Members have said, I was not misled or confused, and I disagree with some of those on my side who feel that this deal is not what the 17.4 million voted for. I am one of the 17.4 million. I agree with the Prime Minister that no deal is better than a bad deal, but this is not a bad deal.

In my maiden speech, I said that democracy was messy. Of course it is. I never expected a perfect deal, and I also knew there would be concessions. Had this deal been on the ballot paper in the 2016 referendum, I would have voted for it as better than remaining. I have received thousands of wholly irreconcilable opinions from my constituents asking me to do things that are mutually exclusive. I have looked at what the best option is to satisfy as many as possible, and I believe this deal respects the referendum while looking after those who have concerns about the significant change we are making in our relationship with the EU. So I am supporting this deal, not because it is perfect or it is exactly what I wanted, and not just because I think it is good for the 52%, but because it is also good for the 48%.

Why do I think that? Why do I think this is a good deal? There are several reasons for that. I like the fact that it avoids a cliff edge, because of the transition period. I like the fact that it gives us full control on services, which are 80% of our economy. I am a free marketeer and, much as I feel we can do well on our own, I like the compromises on state aid and monopoly law—those are good restrictions to prevent our descending into a wholly socialist state. I like the fact that we are leaving the ECJ's jurisdiction and that we are ending free movement. Even the backstop, which does give concerns, has great advantages, not least that we will not be paying any money to the EU despite having access, via Northern Ireland and in other areas, to the EU market. I represent a farming constituency, and the tariff-free and quota-free access negotiated in this agreement are most welcome. More importantly—this is the reason I chose to speak today—this deal gives guarantees on citizens' rights, not just to EU citizens in the UK, but to UK citizens in the EU. There are those who want to vote against this deal and speak about the loss of citizens' rights, but I ask how they can do that, knowing full well that no deal would mean that those people, especially British citizens living abroad, who had no chance to vote in the referendum, would suddenly lose their rights.

People have talked about other options, such as revoking article 50. That is a terrible idea, one that comes from people who think they can wipe away the referendum and pretend it was all a bad dream. That cannot happen and they should think carefully about the consequences. What would we be saying if we, the UK, the fifth largest economy—it certainly was in 2016—with the same population as 15 members of the EU, cannot leave? If we cannot leave, who can? If we do not leave, why would the EU ever reform? Many Opposition Members talk about wanting to reform the EU, but if we cannot leave, why would it reform, knowing that no one else will leave? We need to leave in order to show that it is not a prison but a co-operative organisation and that if it no longer works for people, they can escape it.

The hon. Member for South Shields (*Mrs Lewell-Buck*), who is not in her place, talked about extending article 50, but I disagree with her on that, as to do that would be to kick the can down the road and just keep us in this limbo even longer. What happens if the EU says no? What happens if it demands concessions? The EU has said that negotiations are over and it is either this deal or no deal or no Brexit. I am not against no deal, although it is not my preferred option, but I am against no Brexit, as are the vast majority of my constituents. I doubt I am going to be able to change the minds of many of my friends on the Conservative Benches. I am thinking of my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (*Mr Francois*), and my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend East (*James Duddridge*), for Berwick-upon-Tweed (*Anne-Marie Trevelyan*), for Hornchurch and Upminster (*Julia Lopez*) and for Mid Dorset and North Poole (*Michael Tomlinson*). I wish we were in the same place, but we are not. However, I am happy that at least the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse might be coming across. I will take that as a win and hope that many people will think about changing their minds on this.

12.58 pm

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): When all is said and done, and everything that needs to be said has been said, this House is very good at saying it all over again. Mr Speaker, you could be forgiven for having a slight emotion of ennui, as you have heard these arguments run over and over again. I do not often feel sympathy for the wives of former Conservative Prime Ministers, but Lady Eden said she felt as though the Suez canal was flowing through her withdrawing room and I feel as though the British border on the island of Ireland is flowing through my living room. We have spent so much time on this, but are we any further forward?

Today's debate has tended in some cases—I make no particular comment here—to go in a slightly bellicose, bombastic way; it is almost as though Palmerston had returned to Romford. I felt that the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (*Mr Francois*) was rather more channelling Horatio Bottomley than Horatio Nelson, although I think I understand what his emotion was.

We have discussed at great length the Gradgrind utilitarianism of the EU. I was one of those who voted in 1975 to join the European Union, partly having been seduced by Margaret Thatcher—not an expression Members will hear often in this House—but above all because, as a representative of one of the first generations in this island's history not to have fought a European or

continental war, I felt it was crucial that we looked to the European ideal. In all our discussions about trade, customs, barriers and the backstop, I think we are losing sight of that ideal. I am not saying that the European Union was a shining city on the hill, but it did set global standards for decency, inclusion, human rights, freedom of belief, freedom of worship, interdependence, environmental legislation, workers' rights, animal rights and universal suffrage.

When Francis Fukuyama wrote "The End of History?" towards the end of the last century, he said that the whole world would sign up for those emotions. He was wrong. There are many countries in the world that do not recognise those ideals or the European standard. We are Europeans, and those of us who are proud to be members of this community and continent should recognise that we have a duty and a right to set the standards for many other people to at least emulate and learn from.

We are surrounded in a dangerous world. We have Kim Jong-un, Trump and Putin. We have terrifying figures all around the world. Closer to home we have difficulties, certainly, with Viktor Orbán, Kaczyński and some of the Visegrád Group, and yet we are talking about breaking up and walking away from a Union that is not just the most successful economic union but an ideal and an example for the rest of the world. Are we mad? Why on earth would we walk away from it?

I am not one of those who subscribe to the chimera—the false promise—of another referendum, which would inevitably be followed by a further referendum and then a best out of five. However, if, God forbid, we leave the European Union on 29 March, we must not forget to make sure that our European brothers, sisters and cousins know that we still have affection and friendship for them and that there is still support and interdependence. Every single Member of this House has a duty to work with our fellow Europeans, to let them know that, although this country may have made a decision, it does not separate us from the rest of Europe. It is a decision that I regret. Many of us regret it—more people regret it by the day—but we will not stop being Europeans. We owe it to those whom we have fought both against and with to look forward to the future as one people. Let us never, ever forget that, aside from all the discussions about trade deals, the WTO and the backstop, there is an ideal of a better, interdependent world of decent common human standards. That was represented well in Europe and it is represented in this House. Let us never, ever forget the debt we owe to each other.

1.2 pm

**Sir Mike Penning** (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It is always difficult to follow someone whose oratory is so difficult to follow, especially as someone who was educated in Tottenham and Essex. Most of my friends probably would not have understood a single word the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said. He is a good friend, however, and I take in good faith his feeling that we should continue to be friends with Europe. Actually, I think that they have learned an awful lot from us, especially about universal suffrage, which we were doing long before we joined the European Union.

You might hear me refer to you, Mr Speaker, as I tell the history of my involvement in this particular subject. I started Conservatives Against a Federal Europe, which

damaged my career enormously—it prevented me from coming into this House for many years—because my party was not hugely supportive of people like Sir Teddy Taylor, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) referred to. I vividly remember having to hold a fringe meeting about Europe at the Odeon cinema in Blackpool because we were prevented, profoundly, from holding it in the conference area. I asked Michael Prescott, the then political editor of *The Sunday Times*, to chair the meeting, and you might remember, Mr Speaker, that some chap called Norman Tebbit appeared on that platform alongside a young upstart called John Bercow. Talking about oratory, John Bercow made Mr Tebbit look a bit left wing—I think I am absolutely right about that. Following that excellent fringe meeting, which was packed to the gunnels—mostly by Government Whips trying to find out what we were up to—I got a phone call from the then said John Bercow, saying, "Could you make sure that I am on your fringe next year?" I remember that very vividly. It is in my diaries—for future publication.

Mr Speaker, I know that you will not take it the wrong way when I say that I have not been on a journey since then and I am still as Eurosceptic. That is because of my mentor and my beliefs—my mentor was Sir Teddy Taylor and he is the reason why I am in this House today. I did get blocked at parliamentary boards, as Mr Speaker knows, because he was actually at a certain weekend parliamentary board—

**Mr Speaker:** Not by me.

**Sir Mike Penning:** No, Mr Speaker. I was blocked by others in my party who thought that, perhaps, I was not from the correct background. We are all on a journey.

**Stephen Pound:** What happens in the Holiday Inn should stay in the Holiday Inn.

**Sir Mike Penning:** Yes. It is very important for my constituents to understand that, perhaps, we are having a debate in the correct way in this House today. When we had the referendum in 1975, which I was not allowed to take part in because, believe it or not, I was too young, I did not, a year later, lobby my MP to say, "We want to do it again, because I was not allowed to vote as I was too young." We accepted the decision. I was away in the Army at the time, but we accepted it. The reason why I was so proud of this country in the latest referendum is that the British public stuck two fingers up at the political elite and said, "No, this is what we want to do because you haven't got the guts to make that decision in the House of Commons." Many in this House, including my Prime Minister at the time, did not expect them to do that and, partly, neither did I—in the back of my heart I wanted them to, but my mind told me that they would not do it. But they did. The British public said by a large number—I know that it split my constituency—"No, we want to come out."

I would really like to support the deal of this Prime Minister and this Government, but the issue for me is the backstop. I served in Northern Ireland and I lost good colleagues to protect the Union. I will not vote for anything that does not protect the Union. This will be a sovereign country; we cannot have part of this country

[Sir Mike Penning]

outside the Union, so I say to the Prime Minister and to the Treasury Bench, “Go back, do a deal”—I have done deals with Europe before as a Minister in several different Departments—“sort out the backstop, give us our sovereignty, and you will get this Bill through the House and we will leave the European Union.”

1.7 pm

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): May I say that I am really looking forward to reading the diaries of the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning)—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure that I am.

**Ian Murray:** May I wish you, Mr Speaker, and every Member of this House, a very merry Christmas? Or that is indeed what I would have done had I made this speech back in December when we were supposed to have concluded this debate. We have done nothing over the past month apart from give the Government an opportunity to ramp up the rhetoric of no deal, which even the Foreign Secretary admitted this morning may not be an advisable choice for this country.

Never in the recent history of this Parliament has the next few days been so important to this country and, indeed, to my constituents. Many in this House forget that they were sent here for two reasons: the first and most important one is to represent their constituents, but the second is to look after the best interests of the country. There has been lots of debate and argument, but never has the sound of the Division bell been held in such significance as it will be on Tuesday as we find out which direction this country will take.

I say to those across this House who know they want to do the right thing, but whom the rules of the game of this House preclude from so doing, that they should do the right thing for the country. Brave politicians break the rules. Brave politicians smash the rules and do what is in the best interests of the country. This Government certainly want to smash the rules. They are in danger of being the first Government in history to wilfully and knowingly make the country poorer. This is the first Government in history who proudly admit that they will make my constituents poorer. Surely that cannot be correct. Surely nobody voted to be poorer. We need to stop this catastrophe now, which means voting against the shoddy, blind, worst-of-all-worlds Brexit deal and putting this back to the people in a public vote. Let us have more democracy, not less.

We are 77 days away—the stakes could not be higher—and all the major questions as to the future are still unanswered. It is time for the Government in particular to start being honest with the country, but the Prime Minister cannot be honest with the country for fear of her own Back Benchers. The Home Secretary today told the House that we can have all the migration we wish for in all the sectors that require it, plus uncapped international student immigration, plus trade deals where migration will be at the top of the agenda, and still cut net migration down to the tens of thousands. That is disingenuous to the people of this country. These deceptions must stop, because they are not in the national interest.

The first thing the Government could do in the national interest is rule out a no-deal scenario. We know that any deal or agreement, in particular no deal and the agreement that is on the table, will make our country much poorer than what we currently enjoy as a member of the EU. That is where the Government’s problem comes in. There are two choices: to leave the EU with no deal or to stick as closely as possible to the EU institutions to reduce the pain, suffering and cost of a no-deal Brexit. What the Prime Minister has done is to set red lines that means she does neither. She has therefore united leavers and remainers in this Chamber against the deal.

Now I come to the vacuous soundbite of taking back control of our borders, laws and money. I wish I had slightly more time, Mr Speaker, because I would like to explain why the deal on the table means that we will cede control of our borders, laws and money more than we have at the moment. The deal does not include the 80% of our economy that is made up by services such as financial services and higher education, which are critical to jobs in my constituency. I say that no unicorns is better than bad unicorns for this country.

This issue goes much wider than the economy. It is about EU citizens; it is about our outlook to the world; it is about driving change in Europe; it is about taking our place in the world as a country that wants to work together with others. We cannot achieve what we want to achieve if we are an isolationist nation. The notion of global Britain—I am glad that a Foreign Office Minister is here—is as empty a slogan as “Take back control.” Let us be bold. Let us take this deal on the table, give it back to the people in a people’s vote and let them decide whether this is the kind of Brexit they wanted. If they want to save the country from the self-harm we are about to inflict on ourselves, they could simply vote remain and keep us in the European Union.

1.12 pm

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): I will support the withdrawal agreement in the vote next Tuesday. In making that decision, I have kept one thing and one thing only uppermost in my mind: how do I best represent the people of North Devon and what is in our best interests? I am thinking only of the people of North Devon and what they put me here to do. They put me here to deliver Brexit. The 2016 referendum result in North Devon was clear: 58% voted leave. In the general election of 2017, I stood on a manifesto that committed to delivering Brexit. The result was clear, and deliver it I will.

I believe that the withdrawal agreement, while not perfect by any means, fulfils those pledges. It is not perfect; it is a compromise. There is some stuff in it that I do not like and there is probably some stuff in it that the EU27 do not like, but that is what a compromise is. I believe that the agreement fundamentally does deliver on Brexit. It gives us control over our borders, our money, our laws and our security. It does enough, in my view, to deliver Brexit, while avoiding the risks inherent in leaving without an agreement. We must avoid doing that.

Some say, mostly colleagues from across the House who are strong leave supporters, that the withdrawal agreement does not represent the Brexit they voted for

and that they would therefore like me to vote against it. I am sorry, but I am not prepared to take that risk. It is simply too great. People will disagree and say, “It’ll all be fine. Of course we can leave without a deal. Of course there won’t be shortages of food and medicines. Of course there won’t be a hard border in Ireland, with all the potential consequences that brings. Of course we’ll be able to trade with the rest of the world in some tariff-free, sunlit upland.” I say to those people, “You might be right, but you might be wrong, and that is not a risk I am prepared to take.”

I want to be clear that I respect those who hold other views. I was much taken with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who said we need to be moderate in our language and that, if we disagree, we must do so respectfully. There is one thing I do disagree with, and that is the call for a second referendum or people’s vote. The time limit does not allow me to go into all the reasons why; they run to a page and a half of my speech. Quite simply, there is one thing to say: the real motivation of those who ask for a second referendum is to reverse the result of the first, and that is something up with which we will not put.

I want to say a word about a very important sector of the community and economy of North Devon—agriculture. Farmers are understandably concerned. I want the Government to do more, particularly with the Agriculture Bill. I have met the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on many occasions. Yesterday, there was a significant development when a group of farmers unions issued a very clear statement warning strongly against the risk of a no-deal Brexit and in favour of the Prime Minister’s withdrawal agreement. They have got this right.

I have come to a conclusion that I believe, in my judgment, is the best one for North Devon and the UK. I believe that this withdrawal agreement is just that. Whatever conclusion I come to, a large number of people in my constituency will disagree. It is simply impossible for me or anyone else in this House to please everyone, and it is impossible to reach a decision with which everyone will concur. However, it is my job to reach a judgment that I think is in the best interests of most people, and it is my judgment that there is one thing that most people agree with now, which is that we now just need to get on with it. Businesses, farmers and EU citizens living, working and providing such a valuable input to our economy here, as well as UK citizens living, working or retired in the EU, want certainty. They want to get on with it; I want to get on with it; my constituents in North Devon want to get on with it. This House should get on with it and support this withdrawal agreement.

1.17 pm

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), who is clearly doing his best to represent his constituents in challenging times.

A lot has been said in the past three years about the relationship between the EU referendum and immigration. The National Centre for Social Research has found that people who want the Government to prioritise cutting immigration overwhelmingly voted leave, and those it

describes as “middle class liberals” nearly all voted to remain. It may surprise nobody that in my constituency of Bristol West—hard-core Remainia—I have never been asked to reduce immigration or to do less for refugees. We are proud of the benefits of immigration and of the diverse population that we celebrate in my constituency.

If someone has concerns about immigration or wants it to be cut, that does not mean they are racist, but if they believe people are worth less than others and should have worse treatment because of their race and they act on those beliefs, that makes someone racist. Mixing up the two is unhelpful and insulting—I will not do it—but I think the fear of that has held us back from talking honestly and properly about immigration.

I want an immigration system that remain and leave voters can all believe in and trust, that operates rules efficiently and fairly but honours our international obligations to refugees and respects human rights. In my view, the system the Government are proposing in their long-awaited White Paper and immigration Bill does not achieve this. As a result, I believe nobody is going to be satisfied. This Government have failed to lead a national debate, or even a parliamentary one, about what we all want and need from an immigration system. As a consequence, we do not have a way of talking about immigration, and we should.

I want to talk about immigration. My father was a migrant from India and my mother from a working-class white family from the north. I have lived in parts of the country where absolutely no other brown people had ever lived, as well as very diverse places such as the part of Bristol I now have the honour to represent.

In a sense, we are all migrants—some of us are from families who have lived in the same place for generations, but we all got to where we are now from somewhere else once. We also all have the potential to be migrants, from desire or necessity. In the 1980s, Tory Ministers actually advocated a policy of economic migration when they said to unemployed people, “Get on your bike.” In the last few years, many people—my husband included—have benefited from the opportunities that freedom of movement has provided to live, work and study in countries across the EU. Others have come here to work, filling gaps in our workforce, and they see the benefits of migration.

I want to see an improved response to refugees. Across the country, I believe that this compassionate nation with a strong sense of justice agrees that people should be protected if they are fleeing war, persecution and torture, but I do not think that I have ever come across anyone who thinks that our current system of responding to refugees is working well right now. I will discuss this in more detail on Second Reading of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill.

There are two urgent problems for our immigration policy: the state of our current system and the rise of the far right. The largest category in my case load as an MP has always been immigration, and my experience is of a system in chaos that serves nobody well, wastes public money and treats people very badly. Passports and ID documents get lost, decisions take months, there are long waits for appeals, people are denied the right to be with their families on family occasions when a visit visa is refused, and the Home Office admits that severe staffing shortages have led to a sheer, large backlog

[Thangam Debbonaire]

of rising numbers of claims. There has also been the Windrush scandal, in which people who have the legal right to be here were treated appallingly. And this Government propose to put more people into the same system. I would like to think that this would be a levelling up—a system of high standards for all and fair rules properly applied—but I do not.

I am not surprised that constituents of mine from the EU27 are worried that they will become the next Windrush scandal. I am horrified at how many EU27 citizens are now leaving the UK, leaving behind them staff shortages. I am angry at the uncertainty for British people in the EU27, but I am also sad for people who thought that voting leave would lead to a reformed, fair, reliable immigration system that works in the interests of the whole country, because that does not look likely. On the rise of the far right, I am worried, and we should all be worried, because when we fail to construct an immigration system that everyone can believe, the far right moves into that vacuum. This country is already much divided and I fear that those divisions will get worse.

Next Tuesday, I will vote against the Prime Minister's deal and against her crashing us out with no deal. We will then have to consider rapidly what other options we have. Almost certainly, we will need to consult the people, which is best done through a general election. I want us to celebrate migration. We have the means to do it, so let us do so.

1.22 pm

**Julia Lopez** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I was fortunate enough to speak in the first attempt at this debate, so I shall try not to repeat myself. None the less, the events of the past week lead me to recall again the terrible sense of dread I felt last summer as I looked upon this Chamber and realised that this House risked finding itself out of step with the wishes of the British people. With hindsight, that instinct was simply an extension of the worry that sat deep in my stomach on election night in 2017, when it became clear that Brexit would have to be delivered by a minority Government in a Parliament that has never fully reconciled itself to leaving the EU, in spite of manifesto promises by both main parties.

The direct democracy of the referendum was going to smash painfully into the representative democracy of our parliamentary system, risking a constitutional crisis that could reverberate across our nation. The votes of the past week may lead some hon. and right hon. Members to suggest that Parliament is simply taking back control of the Brexit process in the face of overweening Government—a noble mission perhaps, if it were not for the fact that this House appeared not to be cleaved along pro-Government or pro-Parliament lines, but to be divided by those who wish to deliver on the referendum and those who do not.

I have every respect for the passion with which parliamentarians hold their personal views. We come to this place to fight for what we believe to be the right path for this precious nation, but I say to those who see Brexit as a mistake to be mitigated or a problem that must be stopped altogether: you must surely now fear that the public will see not the principled flexing of

parliamentary muscle, but the conceit of a political class that was already held in contempt and could soon find itself despised.

Let me turn to the substance of the withdrawal agreement. I was elected on a manifesto that committed us to leaving the EU and, with it, the single market and customs union. To this end, nearly three years on from the referendum, I sorely wish that I could vote for this withdrawal agreement and its many sensible provisions, but as hard as I have tried, I cannot ultimately see it as the product of a mature compromise that delivers Brexit or a sensible start to what was always going to be a long and difficult process.

I am not seeking to defeat the good in some naive quest for the perfect, but I say, without careless dismissal or ideological rancour, that this withdrawal agreement is not the good. Far from providing closure, this agreement merely heralds another two years of political discord and economic indecision as we thrash out our future relationship, in the meantime causing immense damage to faith in our democracy and extending the corrosive limbo into which our businesses have been thrust.

As we open up this next chapter, arguments will begin on what kind of future relationship we want, at which point it will very quickly dawn on us that we have given up all our negotiating leverage. Committed by treaty to the handover of £39 billion, we will be tethered to a default position of a de facto customs union from which we have no unilateral means of exit and from which I can see precious little incentive for the EU to move us. The benefits of Brexit, such as the possibility of an independent global trading strategy, will not be deliverable, while the security co-operation offered in good faith by the Prime Minister could instead see us linked into emerging EU defence frameworks.

Before Christmas, hon. Members will each have received the warnings of former MI6 chief, Sir Richard Dearlove, who could not have been more explicit about the threat posed by the superficially benign security commitments in this deal. The CEO of the European Defence Agency himself confirmed that acceptance of the rule of the common security and defence policy is an unavoidable prerequisite for even ad hoc UK participation in the EU's defence projects, which the political declaration specifically requests. This is no small matter, as binding ourselves to the EU's defence frameworks risks, over time, compromising this nation's defence and relationships with our very closest allies.

We are all tired; the country is tired. Everyone wants resolution in this great battle of ideas. But I implore the House to realise that this withdrawal agreement is not that resolution. It challenges the integrity of our Union rather than protects it. The common rulebook is the EU's rulebook. The flexible framework for defence co-operation is a rigid one. There will be no new trade agreements of any substance. This agreement is a Brexit mirage beyond which lies no oasis, but more division and decidedly less sovereign power to resolve it.

Should this vote be lost, I would ask the Prime Minister to make it clear that the withdrawal agreement cannot get through this House, request the removal of the backstop, move on from the de facto customs territory, and present a framework for a future trade agreement with money staggered according to progress made. I ask her, in the meantime, to step up every

necessary preparation to leave on 29 March, which remains the legislative default unless the Government renege on their desire to deliver Brexit.

Parliamentarians have spent the past two years trying to wish away the political meteor that hit the UK in 2016. There is no land of milk and honey awaiting us after Brexit, only the opportunities that we make for ourselves as a people from our own talents, efforts and energy. Whether we fail or succeed is up to us—and that is surely the point. If we vote through this withdrawal agreement, however, it will be the EU that holds the key to our own destiny.

1.27 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) for her comments about the state of migration and immigration. She made some very powerful points that should be listened to and addressed by all.

When is a deal not a deal? When is an agreement just a draft agreement? When is a vote not a vote? Two years on from triggering article 50, Parliament is presented with two documents: a 500-plus-page document setting out how we go about leaving the EU and a political declaration on the future. It is almost as if we have a technical drawing of an EU taxi that may or may not have four wheels and that all of us—well, some of us—may be able to get out of, or not. It is all right; we will enjoy it. But the big problem—and it is a very big problem—is that we have barely a napkin sketch of where we are going. There is the stirring of fears, with cries of “no Brexit” and “no deal”. However, this House will not allow no deal. Indeed, after the judgment of the European Court of Justice, we can unilaterally, and without loss of our current arrangements, withdraw the article 50 notice—the danger that is now described as “no Brexit”.

Once upon a time, no deal was better than a bad deal, and Brexit meant Brexit. Once upon a time we were told that we could have a free trade agreement concluded well before March 2019. Once upon a time we were told that we would hold all the cards—it would be quick and easy. Once upon a time, the free trade agreement with Europe was going to be the easiest in human history. Yet we are 77 days from leaving the European Union with a deal that cannot win the support of this House and leaves us facing being put in the perilous position of no deal. It turns out that the statements were mere assertions, possibly of hope and expectation, rather than any achievable goal based on fact.

Countries across the globe are looking at Britain in despair, and saying to the Prime Minister, “Rule out no Brexit.” The vote was not to leave in any way; the vote was based on promises by a leave campaign that have subsequently turned out to be fairy tales. There are now cries of “Respect the vote!” We cannot change our minds, no matter how the facts reveal themselves. There is no disrespect in re-evaluating a position or decision when better information is available. On evidence, we eventually decided that the world is not flat, and that the earth goes round the sun.

The other effect of the deal is to fuel the cry for a second independence referendum in Scotland, and the Tory party, with “Unionist” in its title, is doing more to

fracture the Union of our four nations than anyone else. In December the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) gave a coherent defence of the value of EU membership in cultural, community and economic terms—a defence that simply by replacing “EU” with “UK” becomes even more valid.

Today we are faced with a disingenuous deal—“the best” is described as “it’s better than no deal”, but that is a betrayal of young people in our communities, and of farmers and manufacturers in East Lothian. The Prime Minister and others say “People are sick of Brexit. Let’s get it finished”, but with all due respect, that is rubbish. My constituents are deeply concerned about Brexit, and about this deal and what will follow. They are deeply concerned about the impact of Brexit on their jobs, about security and, most of all, about prospects for future generations.

With Parliament deadlocked, the promises of the leave campaign have proved to be just empty promises. It is time to take the decision back and give it to the people in a people’s vote. Perhaps we cannot depart from the EU on any terms that will not make us poorer, less secure, and put at risk peace in the island of Ireland—political declarations are more akin to the king’s new clothes, with people choosing to see what they want.

Having been elected to represent my constituents of East Lothian, I say no to this deal. I say no to no deal. I do not have this option, but I would say yes to staying in the European Union, or to a people’s vote, and to let my constituents choose on the basis of fact, rather than a once-upon-a-time fairy tale. That way we may all live happily ever after.

1.32 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield), who is my honourable friend from the Council of Europe. This is only the fourth time that I have spoken in a Brexit-related debate. It is not the fourth time I have spoken in any debate, and it is important to point out that we continue to participate in things that are going on as part of normal business. By speaking only in four Brexit-related debates I have not been ignoring Brexit, but for the reasons set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), in his fundamentally excellent speech at the beginning of this debate, I have been concerned by the language being used, and by the lack of respect for anyone who puts forward a contrary view, both in this place and outside. We have all seen Twitter feeds that have characterised that lack of respect.

My view on this process has been sorely tested, and a major turnoff for the British people comes from the humiliation of the Prime Minister and the British people by the European Commission. That humiliation followed the treatment of David Cameron when he tried to change the European Union. Are we surprised by that at all? We need only to think back to a Council of Europe meeting at which a pro-remain Member of this House questioned Mr Juncker, who was there as the equivalent of a visiting Head of State, about how he was going to handle the budget for the European Commission. To paraphrase his words, she was told to “mind her own business.” We had to remonstrate with

[John Howell]

him to get him to come back and answer the question. That lack of interest in and that arrogance about the whole matter have sorely tested my faith in the deal.

My approach to the Irish backstop is to look at it in terms of risk. If it is so unwanted by the European Union and we are so sure we will not use it ourselves, one has to ask why it is there in the first place. However, I fully accept, having assessed the risk, that the likelihood of our using it is so remote as to be almost infinitesimal.

Similarly, I do not believe a no-deal Brexit is all about WTO rules. In fact, I do not believe WTO rules are the principal reason for wanting a deal. The principal reason for wanting a deal is to bring to a close the 40-plus years for which we have had a relationship with the European Union—to ensure that we know how to deal with all those things that are hanging over the edge, such as legal cases, charging mechanisms and so on.

The Archbishop of Canterbury may, according to press reports, have changed his view about the need for a people's vote, but I have not. For reasons that have already been set out, I do not think a new people's vote is a good thing. In putting forward an alternative vision of what we need to do beyond Brexit-related issues, I am very keen to ensure that we are still players in Europe. We will do that by giving more credibility to the Council of Europe and our involvement in it. Why should we do that? There is one very good reason: our leaving the EU does not mean a bonfire of workers' rights—they are protected by a 1961 treaty, which the Council of Europe brought in and we signed.

1.37 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): In the words of Ian Dury, "Reasons to be Cheerful, Part 2". I gave the first part of this speech on 6 December, at column 1171. The additional five minutes I have today is its continuation—hon. Members will judge whether it is "What a Waste" or not.

I do not want to focus on foreign affairs, but I begin by pointing out, in response to the Government's "global Britain" slogan and their assertion that we will be a free and independent country "again", that we are a free and independent country today. We have had a very successful "global Britain" policy for decades. After all, it was Margaret Thatcher who brought in the European single market, which has been of such benefit to our economy, and the Labour Government of Tony Blair that made such an impact on the development of the European Union out of the European Economic Community we joined in 1973.

I want to say some things about the Labour party, and I want to say some things to the Labour party and to Labour voters and Labour party members all over the country. In 1975, as an undergraduate, I was putting out anti-Common Market leaflets on the Arbury estate in Cambridge the day before my final economics exam. I was campaigning for "Cambridge against the market". We decided we would not be with the "Get Britain out" campaign because it included the National Front and racists and, of course, the Communist party. Stalinists are always happy to line up with the far right—the red shirts and the brown shirts. The *Morning Star* is doing the same at this very moment when it supports Brexit—as does that rape cult, the Socialist Workers party.

The Labour party is in a bizarre position, as was confirmed when I intervened on the shadow Home Secretary earlier. We are pursuing a Brexit which, according to a briefing issued by the office of the parliamentary Labour party earlier this week, is a "sensible" Brexit, whatever that is. The reality, as is known all over the country, is that there is no such thing as a "jobs first" Brexit. It is entirely about mitigating the damage.

I have to say that I do not believe any Government would have been able to negotiate anything very different from what the Prime Minister has negotiated with the EU27, because the EU is a rules-based, legally based institution in which the four freedoms are integral. They cannot be cherry-picked. Whether we are talking about a red cake with red cherries or a blue cake with blue cherries, the EU will not allow it. This deal, the backstop and everything else, is an essential part of preserving the integrity of the institutions of the European Union. Why should an organisation that we are proposing to leave give us better terms than it gives its members? That would be unprecedented.

We must therefore face reality. There is no socialist Brexit, there is no "jobs first" Brexit, and there is no better Brexit. The choice that we must face is this. Do we or do we not wish to go into the blindfold Brexit that is being put forward today, whereby we do not know the future terms of the trading relationship? It could be Canadafragilisticexpialidocious, or it could be Norway-plus-plus-plus-plus-plus, but we have no idea. The fact is that once we have passed this motion, if we do—and I am sure that it will go down—we shall be in a very dangerous, uncharted position, in which a right-wing Government in the future could take us into a job-cutting, deflationary or austerity Brexit. That is why I will be voting against it, and voting to stay in the European Union if I can, to revoke article 50 if we get the chance.

1.42 pm

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), and his "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 2". It sounded as though he might have needed a "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 3" to complete his remarks, and I am very sorry that I missed his "Reasons to be Cheerful Part 1".

That actually relates to my first point: I have been struck by the tone of today's debate. Perhaps it is because today is a Friday, but the tone has been rather measured and constructive. In that regard, I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who made a point that was picked up by my hon. Friends the Members for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) and for Henley (John Howell). Although I disagree with the conclusion reached by all three of them, they were absolutely and fundamentally right about the importance of the language and the tone that we use in this place, and I commend them for that.

I also agree with the comment of the Prime Minister—and I acknowledge her hard work and endeavour in getting us this far—that

"the British people just want us to get on with it."

In that, she is absolutely right. My constituents have been saying the same for a number of months, if not years. I certainly did not come into politics to bang on

about Europe, or to squabble about the EU endlessly. Sadly, however, this proposal does not get on with it. That is my first and fundamental objection, and it relates to the backstop, because we cannot unilaterally get out of it. It is about ceding control and sovereignty, not taking back control. We will be reliant on a co-operative EU in order to exit from it, which is the precise opposite of “getting on with it”. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) said in that context.

People say that we will not inevitably end up in the backstop, that we may never get there, that we could extend the implementation period. However, the Father of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), confirmed at Prime Minister’s questions that these negotiations will take years. On the same day, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) cited evidence that it could well be the mid-2020s before a deal is secured. This deal prolongs uncertainty. Businesses are looking for certainty, and it does not give them that. The Attorney General confirmed in his advice that there is a risk of “protracted and repeating rounds of negotiations.”

We cannot get out of this of our own volition; that is my first and fundamental objection to it.

My second objection is to do with the Court of Justice of the European Union. It is technically correct that we will not be subject to the jurisdiction of the CJEU, but under the proposed treaty it will still retain a significant and prominent role in the movement of goods, VAT and excise, agriculture and the environment. Further, under article 174 of the proposed agreement, when any interpretation of EU law is in question the CJEU will be the final arbiter. The decision will be referred to it and will be binding. As we have seen in the recent judgment in relation to revocation of article 50, it is a highly political court, and this proposal does not rid us of its shackles.

Thirdly, and just as importantly, although I will not dwell on it at length, this proposal threatens the integrity of the United Kingdom. I am a Unionist and a member of the Conservative and Unionist party, and the proposal introduces a separate regulatory regime for Northern Ireland. For me, that is a fundamental problem.

I am a serial loyalist; I have never rebelled against the Government in my admittedly very few—three and a half—years in this place, and I do so with a heavy heart, but with a clear head that this is not the right deal.

In the time remaining, I want to make two further points. The Prime Minister has rightly been stepping up plans and preparations for no deal, or for a WTO Brexit—or a clean, global Brexit as I like to call it. So we will be ready; it is not my preferred outcome, but if it happens we will be ready because we have good Ministers—the Foreign Secretary is in his place—and good civil servants who will be ready and prepared. We are an ingenious nation and we will make sure we are ready.

Finally, the Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that we will have no second referendum and there will be no extension beyond 29 March. As other hon. Members have mentioned, she has been firm in that, and she is absolutely right. There is a huge risk that the political trust between politicians and the public will be broken if that is not the case, and the Prime Minister is right to stand firm.

1.47 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Some 62% of people in my constituency of Enfield, Southgate voted to remain in the EU. I too voted to remain and, like many, I was stunned by the result of the referendum. Many of my constituents found it hard to comprehend. Those who had any relationship with an EU citizen became very anxious and worried about the future.

Some people voted leave because of immigration. I do not believe we had a proper debate about immigration during the referendum, as any reasonable talk of it was drowned out by the noise. The immigration White Paper states that the Government are committed to reducing annual net migration to sustainable levels, but they should be honest about immigration and spell out how it is a good thing for the UK.

EU migrants are net contributors to the UK economy, paying taxes of over £2 billion per year. Contrary to what was being peddled by some on the leave side, immigrants are 43% less likely than native-born UK residents to claim benefits and 7% less likely to live in social housing. The truth is that when people come here, they are not coming here to claim benefits but are coming here to work. When they are working, the whole economy benefits. My constituents who are EU nationals have been working in the UK for many years, contributing to the UK economy. They pay taxes, keep our public services and businesses going, and socially enrich our local community.

Let us face facts: the UK has an aging population. The Office for National Statistics puts the UK median age at 40, with 18% aged over 65, and that figure is increasing. Only workers will secure our future. EU migrants to the UK have tended to be younger and better educated and have the high skills that we need for economic growth. What would it have cost the UK economy to train all those highly educated EU migrants here in the UK? I have no doubt that it would have run into many billions. We are getting the benefit of their education and skills for free because they are choosing to work in the UK.

I am the son of immigrants. My parents came to the UK in the 1960s. They worked hard, paid their taxes, bought their own home and raised a family of three. There were many more like them who made a positive contribution to the UK economy over many years. The Treasury Committee’s report on the UK’s economic relationship with the EU concluded that there will be a significant negative impact on GDP when we leave the EU if there is no free movement of workers.

Conservative Members espouse the idea that leaving the EU would bring freedom from regulatory bureaucracy. The deal actually creates more bureaucracy for business and workers. To recruit a non-UK citizen to work here, an employer would have to make a job offer, pay fees and charges and then hope that the Home Office would process the visa application with lightning speed. It sounds simple, but I am sure all Members know from their casework that visa applications already take months and months. I am not filled with confidence that work visa applications will be dealt with speedily in a vastly under-resourced, understaffed Home Office.

This bureaucracy could lead to a logjam. It will be bad for business, bad for the economy and bad for the people of the UK. Is this what taking back control was

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

meant to mean? This bureaucracy will also apply to doctors, scientists and engineers, to name but a few. Can we really afford any delay when a surgeon is needed to come to the UK to carry out a life-saving operation? And what about the jobs that do not meet the £30,000 salary threshold? We already have a shortage of care workers, teachers, nurses, social workers and other professions that pay less than £30,000 per year. Perhaps the Government are planning on introducing legislation to bring those professions' minimum pay up to £30,000 per year, but I think not.

Rather than setting us free and allowing us to take back control, this deal would tie the UK up in red tape, build a wall around the UK and take up the drawbridge. It fundamentally fails to take account of the reality in the world. I had help in researching the facts for this speech from an intern from my constituency who is British-born and studying at a university in the Netherlands and whose girlfriend is Romanian. This is what the modern world looks like. Supporting this deal would fail to recognise that we are living in an ever evolving, smaller world. The freedoms and opportunities available to young people to work and study abroad are unparalleled. This deal could dash their futures. As the Chancellor said about the referendum, people

“did not vote to become poorer”,

but that is exactly what will happen if we vote for this deal. I cannot and will not support the deal. It will make us worse off, it is wrong for the people of Enfield Southgate, it is wrong for the economy and it is wrong for the UK.

1.52 pm

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (*Bambos Charalambous*). The question being asked by No. 10 and journalists alike seems to be whether it is possible for a Brexiteer such as myself who is half French—une femme qui adore l'Europe, mais pas tellement l'Union européenne—to support the Prime Minister's withdrawal agreement and political declaration in their current form. I can translate that as “a woman who loves Europe but not so much the European Union”. As a pragmatist, I appreciate that perfection is often the enemy of the good. In fact, I am often heard to say to the perfectionists in my family—of whom there are two—usually in relation to homework and procrastination that “done is better than perfect”. That philosophy holds true for any agreement with the EU to assist as smooth a Brexit as possible.

The Prime Minister's unequivocal determination to ensure the status of EU citizens in the UK—including my mother, as it happens—is absolutely right. It has also been good to see the drip-feed of confirmation over the past three weeks that other EU countries are putting through legislation to ensure mutual status for British citizens living in those countries if we have to leave in a no-deal environment on 29 March. However, as the Home Secretary has had to demonstrate in the last couple of weeks, we face challenges of illegal migration relating to what constitutes a refugee rather than an economic migrant, and of what our policy choices, which are supported by our electorate, are and can be in the future. These questions have all been very much part

of the Brexit debate and conversation. The reason why so many people voted for Brexit was partly to feel that they had a more direct line for their views and voting power to be heard in this policy area. They voted not to close the door but to determine these things for ourselves.

I want to highlight one area of concern beyond the question of the backstop, as mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (*Michael Tomlinson*), which is the wider defence and security and canvas. The UK is the leading European military nation in NATO, so I am profoundly concerned that the EU's intention, as outlined elsewhere in the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration, is to reduce our ability as a third country to act independently in the defence arena and to maintain our current position and commitment.

We must look closely at the proposed post-Brexit relationship with the EU that the Prime Minister plans to negotiate and consider whether we should accept what is clearly beneficial to the EU if that would cause significant detriment to the UK's defence industry, our control of our own defence and security forces, and how we can ensure independently and with sovereign capability that we can decide what we do for our economic security and that of our constituents in the decades ahead. I am concerned by the short-termist tone of Ministers and the Government when they say that there must be no disruption to daily life, but the proposals leave us with the long-term risk of not having really Brexited or regained our freedom of choice and, indeed, responsibility for our actions. Brexit means having nowhere to hide and no one else to blame.

The language of the political declaration includes “flexible and scalable co-operation” to protect from threats and close work at bilateral levels and within international organisations, which all sounds good. Then, however, the language refers to combined efforts with the EU. We already have a powerful and effective combined effort framework in NATO, with EU countries wrapped up in that security blanket. The most recent treaty published this week between France and Germany—the underlying reason for the EU being to stop battles between those two nations and to try to maintain peace in Europe after such bruising and destructive wars in the last century—highlights France's continuing need to reassert its position vis-à-vis Germany. Indeed, only yesterday the German Foreign Minister talked again of how an EU army is becoming a reality. That detracts from military effort, financial investment and effective outcomes for all our allies through NATO. We must stand firm in reasserting that NATO can remain the co-operative organisation that provides effective security protection under article 5, and driving through policy to ensure that.

The problems with what the Prime Minister has agreed with the EU risk our ability to protect our defence industry as we believe necessary and beneficial. I remain profoundly concerned that the proposals in the political declaration, off the back of the withdrawal agreement, hold unacceptable risks—although there is always a question of balance of risk—to the United Kingdom's defence and security flexibility and autonomy, and reduce the benefits to UK plc. Having been a global maritime trading nation for the past 400 years, we should be able to bring that back as our focus as we move towards becoming an independent country once again.

1.57 pm

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Immigration has been a big part of the Brexit debate and one of the most contentious issues in modern political times. The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) made it clear that the matter should be debated robustly and respectfully, and I hope to do that in my remarks. Like many others, I recognise that immigration stirs passions, and that this House must have the courage to confront an issue that vexes not only our country and our constituents, but the United States and many EU and Asian states. Immigration is an important issue for me. I have been lucky enough to live and work on three separate continents and to experience the immigration regimes of the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Thailand and the republic of the United States of America. I have been through their immigration systems and have seen costs and benefits.

The United Kingdom has had a significant amount of immigration over the past two decades. A Migration Advisory Committee report makes it clear that the experience of immigrants and immigration across the United Kingdom has been different, which is reflected in the numbers. England has far more foreign nationals and people born abroad than Scotland—5.5 million versus 358,000, and 16% versus 9%. That shows that the UK as a whole is not the backward, narrow-minded backwater that so many Opposition Members keep trying to suggest, but a booming international country that has welcomed and always will welcome people who want to live and work here.

First, I want to respond to the criticisms made by some Scottish National party Members, because their contributions have been ill-tempered and poorly judged. They talk about the UK and Scotland as though they are one place, but we know that that is not true. Net migration in London was over 88,000 in 2016-17. In Glasgow, it was just over 5,000. In Perth and Kinross, which I share with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), it was 148. In Clackmannanshire, which sits entirely within my constituency, the average was 15 a year between 2004 and 2016.

Secondly, other parts of the UK are not hotbeds of anti-immigrant sentiment. According to the British social attitudes survey in 2016, there was a variation of only five to six percentage points between Scotland, Wales and England in terms of opinions on immigration, and that is with Scotland having experienced immigration in the thousands and England and Wales in the millions.

Thirdly, SNP Members make themselves out to be champions of EU nationals, but in 2014 the then Deputy First Minister, now First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, clearly said that EU nationals would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland if Scotland separated from the UK and therefore the EU. They were used as a bargaining chip. It was despicable then and it is indefensible by the SNP Members now.

**Peter Grant:** While this debate has been taking place, BBC The Social, a wonderful fairly new social media channel based in Glasgow, has posted a video of a young woman called Patrycja who arrived from Poland 12 years ago with £100 in her pocket and is now running a vital charity for vulnerable young women in Scotland.

Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Immigration Bill should be changed to prevent the next Patrycja with £100 in her pocket from coming to Scotland and bringing the benefits that today's Patrycja has brought?

**Luke Graham:** I do not think the hon. Gentleman has ever listened to any of my speeches. I am one of the most liberal and pro-immigration politicians in the House. To those who want to work here, live here and contribute, our door should be open, and Patrycja is a fine example of that. I welcome her, just as I welcome the Syrian refugees who have experienced racism in my own constituency. In the last month, I have had grown men in tears in my constituency office because of the racism they are experiencing in my constituency in modern-day Scotland. That racism must be called out and addressed in Scotland, in England, in Wales—anywhere it appears in the United Kingdom—and it will be.

We as politicians should be engaging with this debate. My hon. Friends have talked about being honest and direct. That is completely right. The Migration Advisory Committee report is very clear that immigrants are net contributors to our economy—they make a beneficial contribution to our country—but it also recognises that, where there have been high concentrations of immigration, public money has not followed. We have to invest in the infrastructure so that the burden of immigration—in terms of numbers and public services—is borne by the Government, not individual constituents trying to integrate and contribute.

In my constituency, we have formal advice from Clackmannanshire Council, which is SNP-run, saying that the SNP-run NHS—I have the letter here and I am happy to put it in the Library—has to be mindful of accepting refugees to the area because of the lack of GPs in Clackmannanshire. This shows that the SNP has not managed public services such that we can welcome people to our country.

The immigration proposals and the opportunity through Brexit to shape our immigration policies are very important. We do not need to get lost in a vicious circle of negative stories about immigration. We can talk about the positives, as Members from across the House have done. We have a fine opportunity to develop new visa schemes and forms of co-operation with other countries, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned earlier when he talked about e-gates. We could use our innovative and entrepreneurial spirit to go one further and consider a US-style green card, which in the past has had cross-party support, although the green might be a problem—I would be happy for it to be blue, if that satisfied other Members.

Let's be honest. When we are discussing immigration, we are not talking about faceless numbers; we are talking about real people who come here, contribute and make our country better. We need to break the vicious circle. We have a chance to develop a more innovative and welcoming immigration system in this country. Immigration is a sign of success, not failure, and I hope it will continue sustainably once we have left the EU.

2.3 pm

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am conscious that I will need to be quick, given the time, Mr Speaker.

[Kevin Foster]

This is obviously one of the most momentous debates that many of us will ever take part in, although we must remember that for many of our constituents their jobs, their homes, infrastructure and many other issues already decided in this Parliament will be the priority, as was perfectly encapsulated when I was invited to appear on BBC Radio Devon this morning to talk about the key issue in Torbay today: dustbin collections.

It is worth saying that Torbay voted strongly to leave the EU, so I do not see an option of staying in. People across the bay did not vote to leave the EU just because they saw a bus or they had some thoughts on immigration; they did so because they considered the issues carefully and many wanted to see the UK open to the world, continuing trading and looking at a different path. This is not the way they are sometimes painted and it shows why a second referendum—a politicians' vote—is for the birds. Could we imagine any of us on the doorstep saying, "Next Thursday is your chance to decide the outcome. It is your chance to decide whether we leave or remain"? When they then say, "Didn't you ask us to do that three years ago", we would say, "Yes, but this time it really counts." That is nonsense, as is the idea of extending article 50. I do not see what people think that would achieve, aside from kicking the can down the road for another couple of months. If people think article 50 should be revoked and we should stay, they could at least coherently argue that. I passionately disagree with them on that, as it would be a mistake, it would be going back into the EU and it would make us look like fools. As my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mrs Badenoch) pointed out, if we cannot leave, no one else can, and it would make our future negotiations look daft.

In deciding how to vote on this, I have, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, had the chance to speak to him at some length about it. He has been clear that whatever outcome we argue for, be it Norway-plus, Canada or any other of the future relationships, there needs to be a withdrawal agreement. There are going to be three parts to any agreement; one on citizens' rights, one on money and a third on guarantees about the Northern Ireland border—this is known as the backstop. Few of us in this Chamber would argue about the issues on citizens' rights. We have a responsibility for our citizens who live in the EU, and, having a system in which the EU enforces their rights is where we need to be. Relying on 27 individual Governments is not a practical place to be. I would have every confidence in some countries honouring their obligations, but not all. The money aspect is something we would probably need to tolerate, as to get any agreement we would need to look at our existing obligations, but with this deal we would at least not be making large contributions in the future.

That brings me on to the backstop, which, as a Unionist, I find difficult; I do not see Northern Ireland as a third country. I have read with interest the opinions of people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), whom I see in his place. The balance here is about what the likely alternative is if we do not go down the path of this deal. I have some sympathy with one amendment

on approving anything other than the deal, but, as I saw on Tuesday, there are those looking to use their arguments against this deal not in the hope of a no-deal Brexit, which the UK could survive and manage, putting policies in place to keep our economy going and revitalise it—some Opposition Members would probably then be too busy trying to shoot those down to make that work—but in respect of what would be the actual outcome in this Parliament. That would probably end up being that people would be hoping for no Brexit. Some are open about that, and I respect it when they are, but others are not. So if I want to see us do things such as implement the referendum result, look to accede to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for a trans-Pacific partnership, and at least have the chance of getting a comprehensive trade deal with the US as an independent nation, this deal, in some form needs to go through.

2.9 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate to listen to, even though I have the most astonishing feeling of *déjà vu* about it. Perhaps it is the flu I have been suffering all week, or the massive doses of Lemsip or Berocca I took this morning, but I do feel as though we have been through all this before about five weeks ago and absolutely nothing seems to have changed.

Nevertheless, I am glad to be here and I am delighted to see the Foreign Secretary in his place for the first time this year, safely returned from his recess travels and basking in the success of his new vision for post-Brexit Britain, which he unveiled in Singapore, namely that we are to become the "invisible chain" linking countries across the globe. It is a truly inspiring phrase, but colleagues may not realise that the inspiration has an unlikely source, because the phrase, "The Invisible Chain", first originated as the Spanish language title of the 1943 film, "Lassie Come Home". It is a beloved children's classic: the story of a desperate family who are down to their lowest ebb, with no answers to their problems, but whose fortunes are rescued at the last moment by the return of their beloved dog. Here is the truth: the Cabinet is not waiting for unicorns to come riding over the hill; it is just waiting for Lassie.

It is no wonder that the Foreign Secretary's vision of the invisible chain has been so enthusiastically embraced by his dog-loving Cabinet colleagues, including the Health Secretary, with his invisible Green Paper on social care; the Transport Secretary, with his invisible ferries and invisible traffic jams; and, of course, the Prime Minister running around Europe obtaining invisible concessions on Brexit.

That brings us to the crux of today's debate. Here we are, five weeks after we had the same debate, and so many Members on both sides of the House have pointed out that there is nothing in the withdrawal agreement in relation to home affairs and foreign policy, let alone any other subject, that is in any way different from what we discussed on 5 December.

Let me summarise those contributions that have made that point best. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the shadow Home Secretary, demonstrated with absolute clarity that this deal jeopardises all the co-operation

with the European Union that we have come to rely on in the fields of justice, security and policing, and therefore we cannot accept it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) made it clear in his typically enjoyable speech that the issues of the Northern Ireland border remain totally unresolved. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) made the vital point—I have no doubt that many Conservative Members agree with him—that it remains the case that the deal on the table delivers no control of our laws, no control of our borders, and no control of our money. In fact, it cedes control to Europe by giving us no say on those issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) made it clear that the lack of changes to the Prime Minister's deal means that the economic damage it would do to investment and jobs remains unaltered. That point was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), who pointed out the major problems over recruitment and retention across multiple business sectors in his constituency that are reliant on migrant labour. We also heard a powerful and important contribution from my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) on the hopeless inadequacy of the Government's proposal to deliver a fair system for immigration.

My hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) made it clear that wherever people are in this country, and whichever of our nations they live in, our constituents overwhelmingly reject this hopeless deal. Yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) reminded us, it would be an even greater disaster for our country—from our factories to our universities—if we crash out without a deal.

All of those contributions, and the many others we have heard from colleagues, have laid bare the fact that nothing has been achieved during the five weeks of delay. Nothing has changed in terms of the withdrawal agreement, and nothing of substance or principle has been done to change the mind of any Member, with the possible exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick)—[*Interruption.*] Just one Member changing their mind in five weeks is not necessarily a huge contribution; Conservative Members should not get too excited. It is still likely that the agreement will be voted down next week.

We have been told that there will be assurances from the European Union—no changes to the withdrawal agreement, no changes written into law, just a set of assurances. I hope we all remember the words of the Prime Minister's deputy, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, when he spoke from the Dispatch Box in 2015, as the then Minister for Europe, in relation to a similar situation, when David Cameron was supposed to be renegotiating Britain's membership of the European Union. He said that

“we will not ask the House to rely only on the words of Ministers from the Dispatch Box. We have made a commitment to introduce into the Bill changes that give expression to the assurances that we have given.”—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 234.]

This morning we heard the Foreign Secretary say the same thing:

“Theresa May has said she doesn't just want words. She wants something with legal force.”

Based on what he said this morning, and on the position the Government took four years ago, when David Cameron was renegotiating, does the Foreign Secretary accept that the assurances that the Prime Minister is obtaining from other European leaders will not be worth the paper on which they have hastily been written if they are not also written into law? If that is the case, will he confirm that, before next Tuesday, formal amendments will be made to the withdrawal agreement? If he does not accept that and accepts that this will not happen, the Conservative Back Benchers and the DUP will be quite within their rights to reject the withdrawal agreement, just as they planned to do in December, on the grounds that it will remain fatally flawed. However, I am afraid that the Foreign Secretary knows that there will not be legally binding changes to the withdrawal agreement over the next four days, so the only real question at issue is what will happen after next Tuesday once the Prime Minister's deal is rejected. As ever, the Foreign Secretary has given us a multitude of answers on this subject. The problem is that he gives us a different answer depending on what audience he is speaking to. Speaking to the *Sunday Telegraph* before Christmas, he said that if we had to leave without a deal, Britain would “flourish and prosper” in that scenario, but he then told reporters in Singapore that the disruption caused by a no-deal outcome is

“not something that any Government should willingly wish on its people.”

This week, at Cabinet, when the Work and Pensions Secretary said that history would take a “dim view” of a Cabinet that allowed Britain to leave without a deal and the Justice Secretary said that they would need an alternative plan instead, the Foreign Secretary went back to insisting that no deal was the preferred option. And yet here we are three days later with the Foreign Secretary on the “Today” programme saying that no deal will not happen and that the most likely scenario after Tuesday is that Brexit will not happen at all. I ask the Foreign Secretary to give us some clarity today not on what he expects to happen after Tuesday when the Prime Minister's deal is voted down, but on what he believes should happen after that point. In particular, on the most vital issue of all, can he make it clear whether he is prepared to countenance this country leaving the European Union on 31 March without a deal?

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** Let me give the right hon. Lady that clarity, because what I have said has always been completely consistent. I do not want us to leave without a deal—there would be a lot of disruption if we did—but if we were in that situation, I believe that, in the end, this country is strong enough to find a way to flourish and prosper.

**Emily Thornberry:** The trouble is that that does not seem to be what the Foreign Secretary said on the radio this morning. I am just holding him to account. He cannot go round telling all sorts of different people different things and not expect us to be listening. We are listening. We are the Opposition and we will hold you to account and you need to be consistent because you are in government and you are supposed to be in a leadership position. That is the point, and that is the point of this debate. As I say, to give all these accounts and to try to

[Emily Thornberry]

be consistent is what we wish him to do. Should he also not accept this? He said, as I understand it, back in 2016, that we need to negotiate a deal and put it to the British people either in a referendum or through a fresh general election, and he said that

“we will trust the British people to decide on whether or not it is a good deal”.

If he thought that that was the right course of action to pursue in the event of securing a deal, surely the Foreign Secretary accepts that that is the only course of action to pursue if there is no deal at all.

**Mr Hunt:** And we have had that general election, and 80% of voters supported parties that wanted to leave the EU and the single market. As she has mentioned consistency, will she give a straight yes or no answer: does Labour, or does Labour not, want to end free movement?”

**Emily Thornberry:** When we leave the European Union, free movement will end. It is our policy that there should be fair rules and managed migration. We believe that immigration should look after our economy and should look after our communities. That is the answer; it is a full answer, and it has been consistent. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to listen to what the Labour party has said with the consistency with which we will be listening to what he says, he will find that we are consistent and that our policy is clear. Unless he has any other questions on Labour’s policy, I propose to sit down.

**Mr Speaker:** Has the shadow Secretary of State completed her oration?

**Emily Thornberry:** Yes, I have.

2.19 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** What excellent timing, Mr Speaker, because the right hon. Lady has just said—I think—that Labour does want to end free movement, without then explaining how it will deliver frictionless trade with no more barriers than we currently have, which is Labour’s policy, even though she knows the European Union will never accept that. I do not think we will take any lessons on consistency from the Opposition.

We have had an excellent debate today and I commend all hon. Members who have spoken. It is a shame that the shadow Home Secretary is not in her place for the end of the debate. I thank the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) for her reference to one of my favourite childhood films, “Lassie Come Home”. Of course in that story, Lassie was given to a member of the aristocracy, the Duke of Rudling, but Lassie was not happy and she broke free, without any kind of referendum, and came home. There is a lesson for all of us.

Today’s debate has focused on immigration and the central point, made so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, is that leaving the EU allows the Government, for the first time in almost 40 years, to respond to public concern by restoring sovereign control over immigration policy. Part of that,

of course, will be to be generous to EU citizens who live among us and contribute so magnificently to our national life.

If the shadow Home Secretary had been here, I would have reassured her, as I do the hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) and others who raised the rights of EU citizens in this country. Part two of the withdrawal agreement describes how EU citizens currently living in the UK will enjoy broadly the same rights after we leave. Indeed, if we leave without a deal, the Government have made it clear that our position will be the same. While the shadow Home Secretary was correct to remind us that we are talking about the lives of real people—our friends, colleagues and neighbours—I respectfully suggest that it does not help to say that there is any doubt whatsoever about the status of EU citizens, when in fact there is no doubt. The hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) spoke passionately about the effect of uncontrolled migration on her constituency and how it risked dividing communities. She, along with many Government Members, will therefore understand the significance of restoring parliamentary sovereignty.

We have not talked just about migration today. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and my hon. Friends the Members for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) for emphasising the obligation that falls on all of us to honour the referendum decision. Although I did not hear all those speeches, one of the most powerful contributions came from my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), who said that if we do not deliver Brexit, it will confirm people’s deepest fears about the conceit of the political class.

To her credit, when the shadow Home Secretary was here, she was clear that we have to honour the referendum vote. What the Government say to Opposition Members is, “If you really do want to honour the vote, stop playing parliamentary games and remember that leave-voting Labour voters will never forgive the Labour party if it uses parliamentary procedures in a way that ends up stopping Brexit.”

I say to the hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and others who called for a second referendum that they risk doing profound damage to the integrity of our political system. It cannot be right to ask the British people to vote again in the hope of producing a different result. They should listen to the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who talked about the breach of trust there would be between politicians and the people who gave them their jobs if we failed to honour the referendum result.

**Jo Stevens:** The Foreign Secretary has spoken about trust and validity. Does he accept that, as I said in my speech, the illegality during the referendum has already caused mistrust? People doubt the validity of the outcome

of the referendum because of the things that went on, which have been found by our regulators, the Information Commissioner and the Electoral Commission.

**Mr Hunt:** This is a matter for the Electoral Commission, but exaggerated claims were made on both sides of that debate, as indeed—I think this is fair to say—they are generally made on both sides in general election campaigns. However, people listened to those claims on both sides, and they came to a democratic decision, and that is the foundation of trust in our country between politicians and the people who give them their jobs.

**Luciana Berger:** Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), does the Foreign Secretary accept that many points of evidence and facts have come to light that were not available at the time? In 2016, the referendum was on the principle of our leaving; now we know exactly what it looks like in practice. On the basis of what we now know and from listening to what our constituents and the country want—we only have to look at the polling, which is being done almost daily, to know that this country has moved—they now, seeing the reality of it, actually want to have a final say on the Government's exact deal, rather than on the principle, as back in 2016.

**Mr Hunt:** I gently say to the hon. Lady that last year we had a general election in which both parties set out what they thought the shape of the Brexit deal should be, and over 80% of voters voted for parties that wanted to leave the EU and leave the single market.

The task before us is to recast our relationship with our nearest neighbours while preserving the bonds of friendship that all of us in this House prize so highly. We need to go about that task with every confidence in our strengths as a nation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex rightly reminded us. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex brought home the momentous importance of this task, reminding us, with the sense of history we admire so much, that this is one of the most important decisions the House has taken since the war. As he powerfully said, the moment has come for all Members to come together in the national interest.

On defence and security, my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) spoke with passion and eloquence—partly in French—*et je voudrais dire à mon amie, “Ne t’inquiète pas”*. Contrary to Sir Richard Dearlove and Lord Guthrie, that means, “Don't worry”, because there will be absolutely no impact whatsoever from the withdrawal agreement on our relationship with NATO, our intelligence partnership with the United States or, indeed, our membership of the “Five Eyes”.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** Perhaps my right hon. Friend and I will continue in English for everyone else's pleasure. My concern is not what is in the Dearlove and Guthrie letter, but my assessment of the combination of the political declaration and parts of the withdrawal agreement which, put together, give me—in my own simple understanding—real concerns about the future risk. I would be very grateful if he would sit down with me and look through them in detail because they are genuine concerns. They do not come from anyone else; they are my own assessment.

**Mr Hunt:** I would of course be absolutely delighted to do so.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** I was concerned to read in the draft withdrawal agreement the phrase that there will be increased intelligence co-operation. I asked the Prime Minister about this on 10 December, and she said there is no problem with the “Five Eyes” agreement—none whatsoever.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I want to reassure everyone in this House that it is a paramount negotiating objective for the Government to make sure that we maintain an independent foreign and security policy. It always has been, incidentally, and it always will be.

The hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) was right to warn about the dangers of xenophobia and small-minded isolationism. No one in this House would think in those terms. However, he is totally wrong, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) said, to suggest that the view of Conservative Members in any way reflects that approach. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, within the framework of the new immigration policy, there will be no cap on the number of skilled workers who can enter the UK.

The hon. Members for Liverpool, Wavertree and for Oxford West and Abingdon spoke about the impact of leaving the EU on our universities. I can reassure them that the new immigration policy means there will be no limit on the number of international students who can study in our universities. This is very important because our international reputation benefits immensely from the excellence of our universities. We are coming to a close, but one group whose rights we have not talked about is the nearly 1 million Brits living in Europe. The withdrawal agreement protects their rights as well.

In conclusion, as time is marching on and the weekend approaches, we are now in the final stages of leaving a supranational organisation that has been central to our national life for 46 years. We all have deeply held opinions on this issue, but the voters who sent us here are looking for hon. Members to reach consensus on the way ahead. Britain's friends across the world—the Governments I deal with every day—hope and expect that we will leave the EU in an orderly way and emerge as a reinvigorated ally on the international stage. Let us rise to the moment, meet those expectations and show that whatever our views may be—leaver or remainer—we are democrats, and proud to be in one of the oldest democracies in the world, where we do what the people tell us.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman has talked the matter into the buffers.

2.30 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2))*

*Debate to be resumed on Monday 14 January (Order, 9 January).*

**Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Quite a few speakers in this debate referred to the toxic climate outside this place as a result of the entire Brexit issue, so I just wanted to seek your advice on a related matter. The brain injury

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

charity Rehab holds an annual and very popular MPs versus journalists pancake race, in which the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), and I both participated last year. However, the event has been pulled this year over worries that the climate outside is so horrible that it is not worth running it; apparently Shrove Tuesday is very near exit day and the charity does not think it is worth the risk. I wonder whether you might know which parliamentary authority to raise this case with. Could we have some reassurance that it is still possible for the event to go ahead, because the event raises money for a great charity?

**Mr Speaker:** Clearly it is a magnificent cause, and I am very sorry to hear news of the postponement or cancellation, and the rationale for that decision. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order because it gives me an opportunity to say a very small number of words on the subject of security. She was very likely present in the Chamber earlier in the week when very grave concerns were aired about aggressive, threatening and intimidating behaviour towards Members and journalists. In response to points of order on that matter, I hope I gave sympathetic and understanding responses. More particularly, I committed to inquire further into the matter and to make appropriate representations.

On top of the letter sent to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner by well in excess of 150 colleagues, as I subsequently advised the House, I myself wrote to the commissioner in explicit terms underlining the extent and intensity of concern felt in this place about the threat to security. Further to that letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, I must tell the House that in Speaker's House yesterday morning I hosted, with the Lord Speaker, a meeting with Commissioner Cressida Dick and her colleagues for members of the Commissions of both Houses and the consultative panel on parliamentary security. In the course of that constructive engagement, the police communicated plans for increased security in the period ahead, which they trust and we very much hope will enable Members, journalists and members of the public to go about their business unimpeded by aggressive, threatening or intimidating demonstrators.

In that context and flowing from that meeting, a detailed letter has today gone to all colleagues from Eric Hepburn, the director of security for Parliament, and Jane Johnson, the Chief Superintendent of the Metropolitan police based here, together with a short covering letter from me. I hope that is of interest and potentially of reassurance to colleagues. I am looking in particular in the direction of the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who very eloquently raised his concerns, together with other colleagues, on the matter earlier in the week. I hope that its relevance to the event to which the hon. Lady has referred is obvious. That event is some distance in the future and the question of whether it goes ahead is not a matter for the Chair, but I very much hope that, as a result of the increased security that is now to be set in train, people organising events within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, adjacent to it or in close proximity to it, will feel confident and comfortable that they can safely proceed with their plans. I hope that is helpful to the hon. Lady.

## Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Wendy Morton.*)

2.34 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I am grateful to the House for allowing me to raise the important issue of the Oxford to Cambridge expressway, which is of grave concern to my constituents. I would like to start by giving my sincere thanks to the Minister for his commitment to engage both with me and my constituents. He very graciously accepted my invitation to visit Botley to see for himself how our community would be affected. I am very grateful, and so are they. I hope he sees today as an extension of that visit by putting what was said in our private meeting on the record and into the public domain.

In September, the Government announced their preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway. That corridor covers many different potential routes, every one of which would have a significant impact on my constituents. The level and tone of the responses I have received highlights the importance of meaningful consultation at every stage. Failure to do so, I am sorry to say, has already raised people's suspicions and elicited some strong opposition to the proposals. For example, Lucy, who lives in Botley, sums up the feelings of many when she says:

"I am concerned that there has so far been no"

official

"public consultation. I feel residents only have part of the story so far, and this is very worrying."

Residents have had no say on this proposal overall, as to whether they agree with the stated objectives of the scheme, whether they believe it is an effective way to achieve those objectives, or whether there are more effective ways to spend taxpayers' money. Many have told me that the case for this scheme is simply not strong enough, and that there are other objectives that should be met. Indeed, many have pointed out that there are different objectives within different parts of Government that are contradictory. The scheme, which is proposed by Highways England, is based on the need for a more rapid route for freight lorries to travel between southern and western ports and eastern and northern destinations. At the same time, the National Infrastructure Commission argues that the road is there to help build a million more homes. Yet several residents point out that surely the massive level of commuter traffic that would also be coming on to the road would get in the way of the freight lorry movements, and vice versa. How these aspects are being joined up is, as yet, unclear. Roland and Jackie express the common feeling that the last thing Oxfordshire needs is more traffic when they say:

"This expressway is not needed. Oxford is full. It cannot take any more traffic. Long traffic jams are a regular way of life for us all. The prospect of beautiful South Oxfordshire being massacred by this vanity project is heart breaking."

It is very unclear what the knock-on effect of the traffic generated by the expressway will be. Every single one of these routes will, in turn, affect different parts of the community. I would now like to focus on that.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** I hear what the hon. Lady is saying on this matter. I would like to pay some tribute to the Liberal Democrats, because this project started life in 2015 in a Department for Transport paper that was signed off by Baroness Kramer and Norman Baker, as well as Conservative Ministers. But does she accept the point of view of the Labour council in Oxford that this is a way of reducing the traffic that goes round Oxford?

**Layla Moran:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I will deal with that point later, but no, I do not.

If the expressway is routed round the north of Oxford, there is likely to be a negative effect on the already heavily congested road network around Kidlington, Yarnton and Begbroke. Some investment is already planned to try to improve congestion on the A40, as was mentioned earlier this week, but probably not enough to cope with the existing problem, let alone the additional housing developments already planned. As far as I am aware, the potential impact of the expressway has not yet been looked at in relation to that.

The route will also run close to several important ecological sites. My constituent Judy, who lives in Kidlington and is an ecological consultant and wildlife expert, says:

"I have studied and loved the wildlife areas in the path of the Expressway, especially Cothill Fen, Wytham Woods and Oxford Meadows for many years. All these wildlife areas of national and international importance are potentially at risk of damage from the Expressway. Either by direct damage"—

which is obvious—

"or by damaging effects of air pollution from increased traffic or things like hydrology change, noise or light pollution. These areas are our irreplaceable natural heritage and need to be preserved intact for future generations."

It is worth noting that Wytham Woods is one of the most studied woodland areas in the world.

If the expressway utilises the A34 west of Oxford, that is likely to lead to homes being demolished, a worsening of the already poor air quality around Botley, and impact on the Commonwealth war graves that are close to local schools—the Minister knows that well, because we had a walkabout and he saw it for himself. The expressway will also—indeed, it already does—impact on house prices. While shopping at the butchers recently, I met a gentleman who was concerned that the spectre of the expressway was having a negative effect on his ability to sell his house, and he desperately wanted to move. In our meeting, the Minister and Highways England seemed sympathetic to those arguments, not least because demolishing so many houses in an area that needs more houses, not fewer, seems nonsensical, and would be extremely expensive.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** The hon. Lady mentions environmental factors, which I agree are important. Does she agree that the impact on the environment could be minimised and mitigated if we use existing roads, and upgrade and utilise existing sections, rather than routes that involve virgin grassland?

**Layla Moran:** I do not rule out the use of existing roads, but where the proposed route would impact on a community as directly as it would in Botley, it should be ruled out. Again I ask the Minister to do that today,

because that particular section is horrific, and if we do not rule it out, the wider impacts felt not only there but in other nearby communities could be massive. Sophie from Abingdon contacted me on that point. She strongly opposes the plan because of air pollution in the Wootton area. Jane from Botley repeats concerns about what will happen to schools and says:

"I regularly walk on Westminster Way which runs parallel to the A34 and frequently find the fumes so strong that I have to cover my face and change my route."

As an asthmatic she sometimes finds that she cannot even walk near the A34 as it is now.

Villages, including South Hinksey and Wytham, currently have direct access to the A34, and residents in those communities are worried about what will happen to that access. South Hinksey is already dealing with the start of the Oxford flood alleviation scheme, which will cause chaos to access to the village. The expressway could be an even bigger scheme, and I wonder whether that has been taken into account.

On the final option, if the expressway is routed to the south of Oxford it will have to go through the green belt, bringing a large amount of additional traffic to an already congested Oxford ring road and the A34 south of Oxford. That stretch of the A34 is already at capacity and has regular gridlocks. Any incident on the A34, however minor, leads to a rapid build-up of traffic, and long tailbacks result in commuters using local towns and villages as rat runs just to get out. We should not make that problem worse in the long run by including an expressway.

I would love the Department to focus on delivering the long-awaited A34 safety review, and I would be extraordinarily grateful for an update on that project, which has been promised for months. I also believe that long-promised and overdue investment in upgrading the Lodge Hill junction must be finished before we can assess how to handle extra traffic on the A34. Will the Minister keep pushing the county council to press on with that project, because there have been yet more delays?

It is not clear whether dealing with the many potential impacts of the expressway has been fully costed, or whether those impacts will be left as problems for local communities to sort out after it has been completed. Many of my constituents argue that the value-for-money and environmental impact of the expressway scheme as a whole should be tested actively against other options. Sophie, again, said:

"I would like to see a plan to reduce congestion in the area, as I feel it is at an all-time high. I would like to see this plan focus on public transport improvements, particularly rail transport and cycle infrastructure."

We know that that is happening to an extent, but it could be so much more if we reinvested that money.

As we know, the expressway follows a route similar to east-west rail. However, as plans for the expressway have been worked up, the plans for east-west rail have been downgraded. In particular, plans for electrification have been dropped. A growing list of other rail schemes in and linking to Oxfordshire have been delayed or not delivered—the electrification of the line between Didcot and Oxford has been delayed; Oxford commuters look with envy at the quieter, more comfortable trains serving

[Layla Moran]

Didcot and Reading; and plans for the expansion of the very overcrowded Oxford station have taken years to make progress.

With the right approach, not only could the capacity and quality of rail travel be improved, but much better facilities could be provided for cyclists, as has already happened in Cambridge. Other rail projects, which would cost much less than the expressway, include reopening the station at Grove, on which there is cross-party endeavour; introducing passenger trains through to Cowley; and upgrading facilities at Radley and Culham. All those projects could tie in better with the local cycling network. I am grateful to the Minister for debating with me in the House on a previous occasion the recent report by Andrew Gilligan, which sets out a clear and coherent strategy for investment that could transform Oxford and surrounding communities by making them cycle-friendly. All those things together would cost a tiny fraction of the expressway.

Crucially, there is a huge amount of peer-reviewed evidence showing that when Governments choose to invest money in additional road capacity, although in the short term there may well be an alleviation effect, the long-term impact is more traffic, more pollution and higher carbon dioxide emissions, at a time when we should be bearing down on all those things. However, when Governments choose to invest in public transport, the result is the opposite. At the very least, the Government should have given equal consideration to all the other approaches first before making this decision. If they are looking to achieve the best long-term value for taxpayers' money and are committed to switching from the car to other forms of transport, this is their chance.

In conclusion, I share my residents' deep concern that this Conservative Government are forcing an expressway on our area without fully consulting people about their premise. I am sorry to say that, to add insult to injury, Conservative MPs in Oxfordshire have lobbied the Minister to use the existing road, and I am concerned that that includes Botley. I would love clarification that that was not part of the lobbying effort and that Members did not ask for Botley to be bulldozed. If that were the case, I would let the Minister know, and, as I am sure he is aware, I will not let that or any other part of the scheme drop.

2.47 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for ending a long week with a little digestif on a topic we have discussed in different ways over a considerable period. I congratulate her on securing the debate, which is the latest in a sequence of public discussions we have had about rail and road links, and other forms of transport, in Oxfordshire.

As the hon. Lady kindly acknowledged, I know from my visit to her constituency last year that there is very strong interest in the proposals for this road, and particularly in what they may mean for Botley. I thought her speech was going terribly well until she introduced a rather unnecessary party political note at the end. The fact is that I get lobbied by Members of Parliament from around Oxfordshire of every political stamp, and she is

quite prominent among them. She should be grateful for that, and delighted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) mentioned, this project originated in proposals by the coalition Government, which had Liberal Democrat support. We do not know quite where the Labour party is on the issue, but I have no doubt that, if it reflects on the project, it will see that it is of national as well as local significance.

I will of course turn to the hon. Lady's questions about route design, but it is important to be clear about the wider issue of why the Government believe it is important to fill the "missing link", as it has been called, between the M40 at Oxford and the M1 at Milton Keynes and to develop other road enhancements around Oxford. The arc between Oxford and Cambridge is a nationally—conceivably even globally—significant project. Two of the region's universities are ranked in the global top four, and it is internationally competitive in attracting investment in a whole range of areas of science and technology. It has key industry concentrations in areas such as IT, life sciences, automotive engineering and professional services. We believe that, with the right package of interventions and investment, there is a further transformational opportunity to amplify the position of the arc, the cities that it links and the space in between as a world-leading academic and industrial powerhouse.

It must, however, be acknowledged that, statistically, Oxford and Cambridge are two of the least affordable places to live in the UK, with house prices double the national average. The hon. Lady was coy about whether she wanted house prices to go up or down, and it would have been interesting to know which it was. If they go up, that will benefit her constituents who own houses, but if she wants them to go down, she shares the Government's view that more housing would be a good idea, and that steers her in the direction of the housing associated with this project and with east-west rail.

According to analysis by the National Infrastructure Commission, a shortage of housing presents a fundamental risk to the continued success of the area—and, of course, there is a wider shortage in the country. The commission estimates that taking action in the area could unlock more than 1 million new jobs and increase economic output by £163 billion a year. Those are enormous and, as I have said, potentially transformational numbers. Let me put the scale of that growth in context: £163 billion is roughly equivalent to an economy the size of Scotland's. Even without such transformational growth, traffic growth of up to 40% by 2035 is forecast in the region and threatens to seize up the existing road infrastructure. The hon. Lady was right to raise traffic concerns—I absolutely agree with her about that—but separating strategic from local traffic, which is one of the goals of this project, may help to ease the congestion.

The Government are taking action through a commitment to investment in two infrastructure projects which will, we hope, transform the ability of local people and businesses to get about. Our investment in both east-west rail and the Oxford-Cambridge expressway will unlock economic growth and new housing. In particular, the expressway is expected to reduce journey times between Oxford and Cambridge by up to 40 minutes. Some have argued that we should build only one of those routes, but the Government disagree. Both road

and rail have important roles to play, and they have different uses. They provide choice for users and competition, and they avoid overcrowding on unimproved networks.

As the hon. Lady said, some have also argued that we should redirect our investment to other parts of England to support economic growth, jobs and housing elsewhere. As she will know, no Government have taken that priority more seriously than this one. That is why we are investing in road, rail, active transport and other transport modes to support the goal of national and, indeed, rebalanced economic growth at rates not seen for a generation.

At the time when we announced that we would back the expressway, we also announced the dualling of the A66 across the Pennines and our commitment to improving the M60 around Manchester. Those are both very significant projects.

**Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** I apologise for having missed the first few minutes of the debate.

Although Wycombe is not affected by this route, other parts of Buckinghamshire including Milton Keynes will be, as will my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government who live along it. My hon. Friend has talked of transformational growth, and of both economic and housing growth. Can he reassure me that he will consult Members of Parliament who are currently in the Government—or, indeed, in the Chair—about their views on the project, and will ensure that our new unitary authority is fully involved as it develops?

**Jesse Norman:** As you and other colleagues will know, Mr Speaker, it is terribly important to be aware that no road can be built without consultation, and the scale of this road requires a consultation of commensurate scale and depth. A great deal of informal consultation has already been undertaken by Highways England and by the Government, and we expect it to continue.

As the House will be aware, we have been making substantial investments across the country. We have invested in dual carriageway links between Basingstoke and Taunton on the A303 and on the A30 through Cornwall, and in the motorway route between Newcastle and London.

Let me now turn to the question of the route for the expressway and its design. Last September the Government announced the preferred corridor for the expressway, central corridor B, with options to pass east or west—or, as one might see it, north or south—of Oxford. The preferred corridor was chosen following extensive engagement with local authorities, MPs and interested parties including local environmental groups. It broadly aligns with east-west rail, making it easier for people to choose between different modes of transport, improving competitiveness between the two modes and reducing car dependency for existing and new communities.

It is important for the House to be aware that we have not ruled out any options at this stage. That is a preferred route. We do not make prejudgments about decisions as to the extent to which existing roads are upgraded versus new routes constructed. We have not prejudged any decisions about the number of lanes, junctions, or other features of the road.

**Layla Moran:** If this a preferred route, does that mean the ruling out of Otmoor is not absolute, or is it?

**Jesse Norman:** As I have said, we have not made prejudgments. Our strong preference is not to cross Otmoor. We have therefore selected options that do not do that; we have given that very clear signal. But it is important to say that we are still at a relatively early stage of the process, and our preferred routes are just that, and are subject to further discussion, consultation and review. The Government and Highways England need to do serious further analytical work to develop, design and route options that are workable for communities and the environment, that facilitate freight movements, and that ease people's travel for work and leisure.

As has been mentioned, there are considerable constraints of many different kinds in relation to Oxford, and those are part of the wider process of evaluation. I recognise that this will be particularly important for the hon. Lady's constituents in Botley, as it is for those of other colleagues in the region who are affected both directly and indirectly. Their concerns expressed to her about the possibility of widening the A34 and the potential impacts on safety and emissions were made very clear to me when I visited the area—and walked around it, as the hon. Lady said—as they have been again today by her.

Local feedback is an important part of this process and has already influenced it. As has been said, the preferred corridor avoids Otmoor precisely because it has been widely recognised as an area of particular environmental significance. The Government wish to develop the scheme overall in a way that is sensitive to the natural, built and historic environment, and all those factors will be in play. Those considerations have played a central role in selecting the preferred corridor so far, and a full environmental assessment will be undertaken as part of the route development. More widely, the Department will continue to listen to interested parties of every stamp and from every quarter of the compass as it develops route options for public consultation later this year.

There will be a full consultation on route options to help shape the design so that it meets the needs of local people and businesses and the country as a whole. Indeed, the Department has commissioned England's Economic Heartland, the sub-national transport body that comprises local council leaders across the region, to undertake a connectivity study in parallel with the work we are doing. That study will look at how the expressway can deliver wide-ranging benefits to parts of the country outside the immediate vicinity of the corridor and will go some way towards addressing the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker).

All this design and analytical work will lead to a public consultation on possible routes later this year, when people will be able to have their say on route options, as well as the overarching case for the scheme. A further public consultation will be held on the design of the preferred route.

The expressway is due for delivery in 2030. By that time much work will have been undertaken on Oxfordshire's transport infrastructure. The hon. Lady touched on some of that. East-west rail will be one of the country's most strategically important rail projects, reinstating a

[*Jesse Norman*]

rail link between Oxford and Cambridge. The Government reconfirmed our commitment to that project at the autumn Budget, and it is on schedule for delivery by the mid-2020s. Highways England is developing a series of safety enhancement projects for the A34; the hon. Lady asked about that. The work is currently at feasibility stage and interactions with the different expressway route options are being assessed. On the A34 Lodge Hill interchange improvements, Oxfordshire County Council is leading discussions with Highways England and the Government to develop a suitable scheme that meets local needs.

We of course recognise the importance of walking and cycling. I do so at least as much as any Member of Parliament, as I cycle to and from this building every day of the working week. We note the recommendations of the Gilligan review, which the hon. Lady and I have

discussed. Local authorities can channel investment for cycling and walking from local funds and from the relevant national funding streams, of which there have been a plethora of late, including the local growth fund, the future high streets fund announced in the last Budget and the housing infrastructure fund that will come in later this year. There are also the Highways England designated funds in this road investment strategy and in the next period, and the clean air fund.

I conclude by assuring Members of this House that there will be ample opportunity for them and their constituents to express their views and to shape decisions about the expressway in a way that preserves and safeguards value for future generations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

3 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

*Friday 11 January 2019*

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Year of Green Action

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** We are committed to being the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Friday 11 January marks the first anniversary of the publication of the 25-year environment plan. Over the last 12 months, we have reduced plastic waste by introducing one of the world's strongest microbead bans, setting out plans to ban plastic straws, cotton buds and stirrers and extending the 5p plastic bag charge, and overhauling our waste system with a comprehensive resources and waste strategy. We have laid our landmark Agriculture Bill before Parliament, transforming our farming system for the first time in 50 years to reward farmers for protecting and enhancing the environment. We have committed to a green Brexit with plans for the first Environment Bill in 20 years and a new environmental watchdog to hold Government to account. On the international stage the UK is at the forefront of combating the illegal wildlife trade. Our landmark Ivory Act put one of the world's toughest bans on the sale of ivory into law and hosting the fourth and largest illegal wildlife trade conference in London in October has led to the UK and 64 other countries declaring significant political and practical commitments to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

The plan also announced a year of green action in 2019 to draw together targeted actions to make it easier for people to get involved in improving the natural world and spread the word about environmental issues. It will provide a focal point for organisations, individuals, communities and businesses to learn more about their environmental impact and take action to reduce it.

The year of green action is an opportunity for everyone to get involved and enthused about restoring nature, from gardeners to major transport network providers. With individuals, voluntary organisations and businesses all having a part to play; we would like to see industry leading the way in raising environmental standards as well.

The focus for activities in the year of green action will be on connecting with, protecting and enhancing nature. We will be promoting environmental action through partners, a dedicated website for showcasing partner activity, social media, and events throughout the year.

The 25-year plan puts children and young people at the heart of the year of green action and we want to see them playing an active part in decision making for their future. We are partnering with the charity Step Up To Serve, to help encourage environmental youth social action through their #iwill4nature campaign.

Civil servants will be encouraged to use some of their dedicated volunteering time for taking green action, working with partners on environmental projects.

Parliamentarians can play their part in the year of green action by promoting the messages of environmental sustainability.

[HCWS1244]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Universal Credit

**The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma):** Universal credit is a vital reform. It overhauls a legacy system which trapped people out of work. As we move to the next stage, known as managed migration, it is vital that universal credit works for all.

To deliver this, the Government will seek powers for a pilot of managed migration so that the Department cannot issue any more migration notices once 10,000 people have been awarded universal credit through this process. This approach provides the opportunity for the Government to develop the best support for claimants.

This entails replacing the current regulations laid before the House with two separate statutory instruments.

The first is a negative statutory instrument to provide for the severe disability premium gateway. This prevents legacy claimants who are in receipt of the severe disability premium from moving naturally to universal credit and allows them to continue to claim legacy benefits until they are moved over as part of the managed migration process. We are committed to bringing this important extra protection into force on 16 January and this provision ensures that we will meet that commitment.

A second affirmative statutory instrument will contain the remaining regulations as laid on 5 November 2018. These deliver our commitment to provide the vital transitional protection for claimants who are moved by the Department, which is worth over £3 billion for claimants over 10 years. These also provide for transitional payments to those claimants who were previously in receipt of severe disability premium and have moved to UC before the gateway came into force.

In addition, we are including a new provision in this statutory instrument, which will mean that once 10,000 claimants have been moved onto universal credit as part of managed migration, no further migration notices can be issued. In this way the Government are legislating for "piloting powers" rather than the migration of all claimants. This is in line with suggestions from both the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee and the Work and Pensions Select Committee. The Government will report on our findings from the pilot before bringing forward legislation to extend managed migration.

The pilot will begin—as planned—from July 2019 and does not affect the timeline for delivering universal credit, which will be completed in 2023.

The current legislation provides that, from 1 February, new claims to universal credit will support a maximum of two children, regardless of the date of birth of the children.

The Department has looked again carefully at this issue with particular focus on the families making a new claim whose children were all born prior to the

implementation of the policy. We have concluded that including these families would not be right and therefore they will be entitled to support for any children born before 6 April 2017, the date that the policy was introduced. I am bringing forward the necessary legislation to enable this change.

The policy to provide support for a maximum of two children ensures that parents in receipt of benefits face the same financial choices when deciding to grow their

family as those supporting themselves solely through work. Parents who support themselves solely through work would not usually see their wages increase simply because of the addition of a new child to their family. Exceptions are in place to support those who are not able to make decisions about the number of children in their family.

[HCWS1243]

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Friday 11 January 2019

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