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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 16 January 2019

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Order. Colleagues will no doubt have seen a number of images taken by Members of scenes in the Division Lobby last night. I would like to remind all colleagues that, as the recently issued guide to the rules of behaviour and courtesies of the House makes explicitly clear, Members

“must not use any device to take photographs, film or make audio recordings in or around the Chamber.”

I well understand that yesterday's events were exciting and that these days many people regularly take photographs, which they feel compelled to share with a wider audience, but Members featured in these photographs have not given their permission, and to that extent this represents an invasion of privacy. I hope I have made it clear that this practice should cease.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU: Immigration

1. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908506]

4. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908509]

7. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908512]

8. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908513]

10. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908515]

12. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908517]

14. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the potential effect on Scotland of UK immigration policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908519]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):

This has been a momentous week for Andy Murray, so I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker, that it is appropriate that at this Scottish questions we acknowledge in this House Andy's extraordinary contribution to British sport, and his personal resilience and courage, and express our hope that we will once again see Andy Murray on court.

I am in regular contact with the Home Secretary on a range of issues of importance to Scotland, including future immigration policy after the UK leaves the European Union.

Mr Speaker: Apart from his enormous talent, can I agree with the Secretary of State more widely about Andy Murray? He is the embodiment of guts and character, and the most terrific ambassador for Scotland, for tennis and for sport. His mother Judy must be the proudest mother in the world.

Martyn Day: The Tories' obsession with slashing immigration to the tens of thousands will see Scotland's working-age population decline by 4.5%—that is 150,000 people—by 2041. Is the Secretary of State happy standing over such a policy that will cause economic harm to our country?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman does not correctly characterise the situation. The immigration White Paper that this Government have set out is an undertaking to embark on a year-long engagement process across the whole UK to enable businesses and other stakeholders to shape the final details of a post-Brexit immigration policy and process.

Neil Gray: May I concur, Mr Speaker, with your comments and those of the Secretary of State regarding Andy Murray? I would encourage all Members to sign my early-day motion recognising his achievements.

Immigration has been and continues to be good for Scotland. Scottish Government modelling suggests that a Brexit-driven reduction in migration will see real GDP drop by 6.2% by 2040, which has a monetary value of about £6.8 billion and a £2 billion cost to Government revenue. Does the Secretary of State believe that this cost to Scotland is a price worth paying for his Government's Brexit mess and immigration folly?

David Mundell: I do not want to end up repeating my first answer on seven occasions. I want to make it clear that the immigration White Paper that we have published is a consultation. It is an undertaking of a year-long engagement process across the whole UK, including Scotland. I expect Scottish businesses, Scottish stakeholders and, indeed, the Scottish Government to play an active part in that process.

Dr Whitford: Scrapping freedom of movement will make recruiting staff for NHS Scotland harder. Despite being paid the real living wage, lab technicians, admin staff and social care workers do not earn anywhere close to £30,000. So what did the Secretary of State do to try to convince the Home Secretary to take into account Scotland's needs?

David Mundell: I am not going to take any lectures on Scotland's needs in relation to the NHS from the hon. Lady or the SNP—a party that has put up tax in Scotland such that doctors and nurses in Scotland pay more tax than anywhere else in the UK.

Deidre Brock: I was interested to hear the Secretary of State's comments about Scottish businesses. CBI Scotland has said that White Paper proposals “don't meet Scotland's needs” and were a “sucker punch”. Is it not the case that this hostile immigration policy proves that the Tory Government are anti-business?

David Mundell: I am really pleased to hear the hon. Lady supporting the CBI, because it could not have been clearer that it does not want a separate Scottish immigration policy. It wants one immigration policy for the whole United Kingdom, and I agree.

David Linden: I am sorry, but this is absolutely pathetic. We have an ageing population, and we need people to come and look after the folk at Greenfield Park care home in my constituency, for example. The Secretary of State is out of touch. When will he get a grip and understand that Scotland's immigration needs are entirely different from the London-centric policy pursued by this British Government?

David Mundell: I well understand the issues facing Scotland, and I do not believe that it would be better served by a separate immigration policy. I also do not believe that immigration into Scotland is well served by a Scottish Government who put up tax and have a poor record on infrastructure and housing.

Marion Fellows: The policy chair of the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland has said:

“The UK Government's obstinate approach to immigration is a clear threat to... local communities”

making it

“nigh impossible for the vast majority of Scottish firms to”

get the labour and skills

“they need to grow and sustain their operations.”

With what part of that comprehensive statement would the Secretary of State care to disagree?

David Mundell: I set out in my previous answers that the immigration White Paper is a consultation. The FSB and others are contributing to it, and we will listen to them. I am clear that Scotland benefits from a UK-wide immigration policy, but I also believe that there are things that the Scottish Government could do to make Scotland more attractive.

Drew Hendry: Following the disgraceful Christmas video aimed at EU nationals and then the Government's catastrophic defeat last night, will the Secretary of State urge his Government to end the hostile approach to our EU friends, neighbours and colleagues, who are vital to the Scottish economy and Scotland's communities?

David Mundell: I agree that EU nationals have played an enormous part in the Scottish economy and more widely in civic society. I want to give them certainty on their position, which is why I voted for the deal last night.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that *The Times* reported on 10 January that a study conducted by one of Britain's leading social surveys showed that Scots do not want immigration to be devolved? Does he agree that that is a hammer blow to the Scottish National party's calls and that the biggest danger to Scotland is the SNP's drive towards another independence referendum, which puts people off wanting to come to Scotland?

David Mundell: It is certainly clear that the SNP does something to put people off coming to Scotland. I read last night that Boy George was going to be moving to Scotland, but the Scottish First Minister engaged with him this morning, and now we hear that he is not coming.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Home Office and the Government in general have been engaging and will continue to engage with Scottish businesses on the consultation around the immigration Bill?

David Mundell: Yes, we will continue to engage. The White Paper is part of an engagement process. My hon. Friend, who is a great champion of the fishing industry, has already raised issues in relation not just to fishing vessels, but to fish processing.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I welcome this Government's move to guarantee EU citizens' rights here in the UK. That is unlike the SNP in 2014, when it threatened EU citizens that 160,000 of them would be stripped of their right to remain in Scotland. No unilateral guarantee was given to EU citizens by the SNP in 2014, but this Government are doing so now. Will my right hon. Friend clarify the direct communications that this Government are having with EU citizens in my constituency and elsewhere in Scotland to ensure that they know that they are a welcome and valued part of our community?

David Mundell: The Government are not just engaging with EU citizens, but setting out how they can proceed in the settled status process.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): The borderlands area needs to attract more people to live and work on both sides of the border. Does the Secretary of State agree that the way to do that is through investment, both private and public, and by creating the business environment for that investment, not by increasing taxes and regulation?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. As he knows, this Government fully support the borderlands initiative. It is investing in the improvement of infrastructure and housing that will make the south of Scotland and the north of England more attractive, not putting up taxes.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Tax divergence by the Scottish Government is damaging my Gordon constituency, which is struggling to attract overseas workers to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and the oil and gas industry. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is economic madness and that it makes Scotland unattractive?

David Mundell: As I have said many times in the Chamber, I remain at an absolute loss to understand why the SNP thinks that making Scotland the most highly taxed part of the United Kingdom is an attractive proposition to bring people to Scotland.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): May I, as the Member of Parliament for Dunblane, add my admiration for Sir Andy Murray and, indeed, for his mother?

On the White Paper on future immigration, does my right hon. Friend agree that the salary floor of £30,000 makes it difficult for Scotland to retain international graduates when the average graduate salary is £21,000? There has to be the opposite of London weighting, does there not?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, which I am sure will be taken into account as we move forward with the engagement process on the White Paper.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State's Government have been responsible for pursuing an agenda in which immigrants are demonised. We saw it over the past year with the hostile environment policy; we saw it over the Christmas break as the Home Secretary declared a national crisis when a handful of refugees made the perilous journey across the channel; and we now see it in black and white in the immigration White Paper. My question is simple: will the Secretary of State apologise for his Government's demonisation of immigrants and its harmful consequences for the Scottish economy?

David Mundell: Of course I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of events. Scotland remains a place where migrants should be welcome, wherever they come from. The White Paper sets out the basis for a consultation on developing a new immigration policy post Brexit, and I encourage everyone to take part in that consultation.

Defence Sector

2. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): What recent estimate he has made of the value of the defence sector to the Scottish economy. [908507]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (**Stuart Andrew**): The Ministry of Defence spent nearly £1.6 billion with Scottish businesses in 2016-17, supporting some 10,500 jobs. This demonstrates the vital contribution of the workforce in Scotland to defending the UK from the growing threats we face from across the globe.

Kelvin Hopkins: At Defence questions on 26 November, I raised concerns about the desperate shortage of Royal Navy coastal defence vessels, which number just three according to the Minister for the Armed Forces. It is

also the case that Scottish shipyards have suffered from major cuts in defence orders. Will the Government now right both those wrongs by allocating new orders for coastal defence vessels from Scottish shipbuilders?

Stuart Andrew: I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have secured 20 years' worth of work for the Clyde shipyards. We would be hard-pressed to find any industry in the UK that could say it has secured 20 years' worth of work to help its workforce for the future.

15. [908520] **Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Armed forces personnel in my constituency of Angus and across Scotland warmly welcomed the UK Government's intervention last year to mitigate the Scottish Government's income tax increase. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the UK Government will seek to continue that mitigation to ensure our armed forces personnel in Scotland are not out of pocket?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this important issue. The Ministry of Defence is reviewing the Scottish Government's plans for next year's tax, and we await the final outcome and ratification from the Scottish Parliament. We will review the situation and determine whether the impact on the UK armed forces warrants an offer of financial mitigation. Once a decision has been made, an announcement will be made to this House and to those affected personnel.

Mr Speaker: Happy birthday, Mr Sweeney. I gather it is a significant birthday—30 today and you do not look a day older than 20.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The defence sector is critical for the Scottish economy, but so are other sectors, such as financial services, higher education, food and drink, and fisheries. So will the Minister have a chat with the Secretary of State to make sure that in Cabinet the Secretary of State is insisting that a no-deal outcome is ruled out?

Stuart Andrew: I admire the hon. Gentleman's ingenious way of bringing in defence industry issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is constantly fighting for Scotland around the Cabinet table and he will continue to do so long into the future.

11. [908516] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Glasgow has a proud shipbuilding tradition, and long may that continue, but the Minister will be aware of the situation on key land platform contracts. What is he doing to make sure that Scotland gets a good share of those contracts?

Stuart Andrew: As I said, we are trying to build in a good shipbuilding programme so that shipyards around the country know what the Ministry of Defence's requirements are going to be for the next 30 years and they can plan accordingly. We also want them to be incredibly competitive, so that they are able to compete for commercial lines, and not just in this country—we want them to be able to compete for opportunities around the world.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What would the impact of the break-up of the Union be on defence supply companies based in Scotland?

Stuart Andrew: Catastrophic.

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I wish to start by adding my sentiments to those expressed by the Secretary of State on our wonderful sportsman Andy Murray.

The Secretary of State has turned his back on Scotland's great shipbuilding tradition by putting the fleet solid support contract out to international tender. He will no doubt trot out the line, "These are not warships." However, the Minister of State for Defence, Earl Howe, responded to a written question by saying that a ship such as this is a "non-complex warship". I grew up in a shipbuilding community. A warship carried weapons, explosives and ammunition, which is exactly what these ships do. So if these are not warships, what are they?

Stuart Andrew: I have made this point consistently, as the hon. Lady will know: the national shipbuilding strategy defines warships as frigates, destroyers and aircraft carriers. The primary role of the FSS ships is the replenishment of naval vessels with bulk stores. They are non-combatant naval auxiliary support ships, and therefore they will go out to international competition. What I am delighted to see is that there is a British bid in that competition.

Lesley Laird: May I suggest to the Secretary of State that he might want to visit a shipyard, as I am sure plenty of workers there would like to give him a different account of that strategy? We are talking about highly skilled, high-paid jobs that could return £2.3 billion of revenue to the Treasury, while providing sustainable employment and ensuring that communities continue to thrive. Instead, the Secretary of State is torpedoing Scottish shipbuilding in favour of bargain basement deals. So will he allow this Prime Minister to continue the destructive legacy of Thatcher or will he support the Scottish Labour party and the Labour party by backing our plans to finally stand up for Scottish shipbuilding, and protect and create jobs in the industry?

Stuart Andrew: It may have escaped the hon. Lady's attention but I am not the Secretary of State, and I have visited many of the shipyards around this country and in Scotland. I have seen for myself how well they are doing. We want them to be competitive, so that they can have a long-term future. We have 20 years of work guaranteed for Scotland's shipyards, and Conservative Members can be proud of that.

Moray Growth Deal

3. **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): What progress has been made on securing the Moray growth deal. [908508]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): We have been making good progress since the Government's intention to negotiate a Moray deal was announced in September 2018. The partners there have submitted a number of project proposals, which are currently being scrutinised.

Douglas Ross: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. The Ministry of Defence is one of the largest employers in Moray, and it is set to get even bigger after significant UK Government investment. Given that local personnel at Kinloss barracks and RAF Lossiemouth are already engaged with the Moray growth deal, will the Minister confirm that his Department will now play a significant role in this important deal for Moray?

Stuart Andrew: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing on this deal; I know that he takes a keen interest in it, as does the MOD in terms of surplus land being released at Forthside as part of the Stirling deal. He is right that as a local employer we are an important player in that area. I can confirm that the MOD is exploring opportunities for involvement in my hon. Friend's local growth deal.

Leaving the EU

5. **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the UK leaving the EU. [908510]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I regularly meet the Scottish Government in a number of forums to discuss a range of matters related to EU exit. The Joint Ministerial Committee plenary met on 19 December and was attended by the First Ministers for Scotland and Wales, along with the head of the Northern Ireland civil service.

Kirsty Blackman: Will the Secretary of State encourage the Prime Minister to extend article 50?

David Mundell: The Prime Minister has set out quite clearly that it is not her intention to request an extension of article 50.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Scotland wanted nothing to do with this ugly, self-defeating Brexit, but last night 10 Scottish Tories voted to defy their constituents, with the other three wanting something much worse for Scotland. What should the Scottish people therefore do to ensure that they are suitably democratically rewarded?

David Mundell: We are not taking lectures from a man who repeatedly defies the democratic will of the Scottish people by ignoring the outcome of the 2014 independence referendum.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Although we were in different Lobbies last night, I appreciate that the Secretary of State genuinely felt that the Prime Minister's deal was the best way forward, but he can read the runes as to how likely it is that that deal, or any reincarnation of it, will get through the House, so what personal commitment will he give that he will do everything in his power to protect Scotland from the catastrophe of a no-deal exit, including by putting his country above his party and his own position?

David Mundell: I have been very clear about the ramifications for Scotland of a no-deal Brexit and why I want to avoid that, which is why I voted for the deal. I am also clear that I stood in the 2017 general election

on a manifesto commitment to deliver an orderly Brexit for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and that is what I intend to do.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): May I begin by associating my colleagues on these Benches with your comments, Mr Speaker, and those of the Secretary of State, regarding Andy Murray? He is indeed a great ambassador for his country, and I believe that in that capacity his best is yet to come.

Last night, this place made history: we defeated the Government's plans by an unprecedented majority. They are plans on which the Secretary of State has staked his reputation and on which his fingerprints are indelibly printed. Given that massive defeat, will he now commit to meaningful engagement with the Scottish Government and consideration of alternative plans, including remaining in the single market and customs union?

David Mundell: I make no apology for supporting the Prime Minister's deal; I believe that it was the right deal for Scotland and the United Kingdom. We will of course engage constructively with the First Minister and the Scottish Government, but if we are to do so, they must bring forward proposals other than stopping Brexit and starting another independence referendum.

Tommy Sheppard: I was going to suggest that the Secretary of State is ill-equipped to take this process forward in Scotland, but he makes the argument for me. Given his refusal to engage properly in discussion about alternatives, and given the fact that he is so out of step with opinion in Scotland at every level, will he now do the decent thing and resign—step aside so that someone else can take this forward?

David Mundell: That is getting a little tired; I thought the hon. Gentleman could think of another soundbite. I am not out of step with opinion in Scotland. People in Scotland do not want another independence referendum, and they recognise that the SNP has weaponised Brexit to try to deliver such a referendum.

Leaving the EU: Common Fisheries Policy

6. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the potential benefits to the Scottish fishing industry of the UK leaving the common fisheries policy. [908511]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Leaving the common fisheries policy will allow the UK to take back control of our waters, becoming an independent coastal state. We will negotiate a fairer share of fishing opportunities to benefit fishermen in Scotland and across the whole United Kingdom.

Kevin Foster: I thank my right hon. Friend for the positive assessment that he has just given the prospects not just for Scotland's fishing industry from leaving the EU's common fisheries policy, but for the whole UK's. Does he agree, though, that those benefits will be lost if we listened to the arguments of those who want to separate our Union but reunite Scotland with the European Union's common fisheries policy?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The SNP is a false friend to Scottish fishermen. It wants to keep Scotland in the CFP by staying in the EU, and, failing that, it wants an independent Scotland to rejoin the CFP. Throughout the negotiations, this Government have shown that they have put the interests of Scottish fishermen and those across the UK at the heart of our approach to leaving the EU.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Would no deal not be a disaster for the fishing industry and its support industries, and should we not say no to no deal now?

David Mundell: If that is the hon. Gentleman's view, he should have voted for the Prime Minister's deal last night.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If the Government's commitment to ending the CFP on 31 December next year is sincere, why do they continue to resist amendments to put that date in the Fisheries Bill?

David Mundell: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman, a former colleague, will find that that is an accurate interpretation of the Government's position. Colleagues such as my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) have argued strongly for that case, and we will see what happens when the Bill returns on Report.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked— Engagements

Q1. [908591] **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 16 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning the appalling attack in Nairobi and in sending our thoughts and prayers to all those who have lost loved ones. Our high commissioner has confirmed one British fatality. We are providing consular assistance to British nationals affected by the attack. We stand in solidarity with the Government and people of Kenya, and will continue to offer our support to meet the challenge to security and stability that is posed by terrorism in the region.

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

Charlie Elphicke: May I join the Prime Minister in her strong condemnation of terror?

You will know, Mr Speaker, as will the Prime Minister, that I first sought election to this House because I believed in more jobs, lower taxes, a stronger economy and more investment in the public services on which we all rely. Does the Prime Minister agree that, since 2010, Conservative Governments have delivered time and again for the British people and that the biggest threat to that is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, with a leader whose policies would mean fewer jobs, higher taxes, a weaker economy and less investment in our public services?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What have we seen under the Conservatives in government? We have seen 3.4 million more jobs; that is

more people earning an income, earning a wage, able to provide for their families. We have seen more children in good and outstanding schools and more money in our national health service. What would put that in danger? A Government led by the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). There would be more borrowing, more taxes, more spending and fewer jobs.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): May I start by correcting the record? Last night, I suggested that this was the largest Government defeat since the 1920s. I would not wish to be accused of misleading the House, because I have since been informed that it is in fact the largest ever defeat for a Government in the history of our democracy.

Shortly after the Prime Minister made her point of order last night, her spokesperson suggested that the Government had ruled out any form of customs union with the European Union as part of their reaching-out exercise. Will the Prime Minister confirm that that is the case?

The Prime Minister: The exercise that I indicated last night is, as I said, about listening to the views of the House and wanting to understand the views of parliamentarians, so that we can identify what could command the support of this House and deliver on the referendum. The Government want first to ensure that we deliver on the result of the referendum—that is leaving the European Union—and we want to do so in a way that ensures we respect the votes of those who voted to leave in that referendum. That means ending free movement, getting a fairer deal for farmers and fishermen, opening up new opportunities to trade with the rest of the world and keeping good ties with our neighbours in Europe.

Jeremy Corbyn: My question was about the customs union. The Prime Minister seems to be in denial about that just as much as she is in denial about the decision made by the House last night. I understand that the Business Secretary told business leaders on a conference call last night, “We can’t have no deal for all the reasons that you’ve set out.” Can the Prime Minister now reassure the House, businesses and the country and confirm that it is indeed the Government’s position that we cannot have no deal?

The Prime Minister: The point that the Business Secretary was making, and that he has made previously, is that if we do not want to have no deal, we have to ensure that we have a deal. There are actually two ways of avoiding no deal. The first is to agree a deal, and the second would be to revoke article 50. That would mean staying in the European Union and failing to respect the result of the referendum, and that is something that this Government will not do.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister has not answered on a customs union and has not answered on no deal, and continues to spend £4.2 billion of public money on a no-deal scenario. Can she not understand that yesterday the House rejected her deal? She needs to come up with something different.

But it is not just on Brexit that this Government are failing. Four million working people are living in poverty, and there are half a million more children in poverty compared with 2010. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation confirms:

“In-work poverty has been rising...faster than employment”.

With poverty rising, can the Prime Minister tell us when we can expect it to fall for the time that she remains in office?

The Prime Minister: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what is happening. We now see 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty; that is a record low. We see 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty; that is a record low. There is a record low in the number of children living in workless households, and income inequality is lower than at any point under the last Labour Government. That is Conservatives delivering for the people of this country. What would we see from the Labour party? We would see £1,000 billion more in borrowing and taxes—the equivalent of £35,000 for every household in this country. That is Labour failing to deliver for working people, because working people always pay the price of the Labour party.

Jeremy Corbyn: In denial about a customs union; in denial about no deal; in denial about the amount of money being spent preparing for no deal; and in denial about last night’s result. Even the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights says—[*Interruption.*] It is very telling indeed that as soon as I mention the report of the UN rapporteur, who said that the Government were in a “state of denial” about poverty in Britain, Tory MPs start jeering. Tell that to people queuing up at food banks.

The Government have failed too on children’s education. Can the Prime Minister tell us what is her greatest failure—is it that education funding has been cut by £7 billion, that per pupil funding has fallen by 8%, that sixth-form funding has been cut by a fifth or that the adult skills budget has been slashed by 45%? Which is it, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: We have hundreds of free schools, a reformed curriculum and 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools, and we are narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children. This is a Government who are delivering the education that our children need for their future.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about us being in denial. The only person in denial in this Chamber is him, because he has consistently failed to set out what his policy on Brexit is. I said to him last week that he might do with a lip reader; when it comes to his Brexit policy, the rest of us need a mind reader.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister is very well aware that we want there to be a customs union with the EU. She seems to be in denial about that.

One of the problems the Prime Minister has in her denial is a flagrant disregard for facts and statistics. The UK Statistics Authority has written to the Department for Education four times to express its concern about the use of dodgy figures by her Ministers.

When police officers told the then Home Secretary not to make more cuts to the police, that Home Secretary accused them of “crying wolf”. With 21,000 fewer police officers and rising crime, does the Prime Minister accept that the then Home Secretary got it wrong?

The Prime Minister: As we look at what is happening particularly with knife crime and serious violence, we recognise the need to take action. That is why we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill and why my

right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has introduced the serious violence strategy. We are also making nearly £1 billion more available to police forces over the next year.

Yet again, in all these questions about public services, the right hon. Gentleman only ever talks about the money that is going in. What matters as well with the police is the powers that we give them. When it came to taking more action on knife crime and the criminals involved in it, and we said that somebody caught on the street with a knife for a second time should be sent to prison, what did the right hon. Gentleman do? He voted against it. He does not support our police, and he does not support our security.

Jeremy Corbyn: It was a Labour Government who increased the number of police on our streets. It was a Labour Government who brought in safer neighbourhoods. It was a Labour Government that properly funded the police force. It is the Tories who have cut it. Ask anyone on any street around this country whether they feel safer now than they did eight years ago—I think we all know what the answer would be.

It was that Home Secretary who not only attacked the police in that way but created the hostile environment and the Windrush scandal. She promised to tackle burning injustices, but she has made them worse, as Windrush showed. There is more homelessness, more children in poverty, more older people without care, longer waits at A&E, fewer nurses, rising crime, less safe streets and cuts to children's education. This Government have failed our country. They cannot govern and cannot command the support of most people on the most important issue at the moment: Brexit. They failed again and lost the vote last night. Is it not the case that every other previous Prime Minister faced with the scale of defeat last night would have resigned, and the country would be able to choose the Government it wants?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, in his peroration, talked about the importance of the issue of Brexit facing this country. Later today, we will have the no-confidence debate. He has been calling for weeks for a general election, yet when he was asked on Sunday whether he would campaign to leave the European Union in a general election, he refused to answer not once, not twice, not three times, but five times. On what he himself describes as the key issue facing this country, he has no answer. The Leader of the Opposition has let antisemitism run riot in his party. He would abandon our allies, weaken our security and wreck our economy, and we will never let that happen.

Q7. [908597] **Mr Robert Goodwill** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of the Sirius Minerals project in my constituency, which is already employing about 1,000 people and is set to boost British exports by £2 billion. From her visits to China, where she met the company's customers, she will know how important its polyhalite fertiliser product can be around the world. The company is currently seeking a Treasury guarantee to complete its financing. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that this is precisely the sort of project the Government should be supporting to show our commitment to the northern powerhouse and the industrial strategy?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this, because I was particularly pleased to meet the CEO of Sirius during my trip to China and talk to people there about the work that they are doing. It is, as he says, exactly projects like this, which drive investment and exports in the north, that are what the northern powerhouse is all about. In relation to the particular discussions my right hon. Friend mentioned, I am sure he will understand these are commercially sensitive, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific discussions. But this, as I say, is exactly the sort of project that the northern powerhouse is all about: driving investment, driving exports—good for the north.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister on the atrocity in Kenya and, of course, our solidarity with the people there?

Yesterday, the Attorney General said that any new deal would be much the same as the one already on the table. We know that the European Union will not renegotiate. If the Prime Minister survives today to bring forward her plan B, will she concede that plan B will basically be a redressing of plan A?

The Prime Minister: As I said in one of my answers to the Leader of the Opposition, what we want to do, following the defeat that we had in this House last night, is listen to parliamentarians and find out: what is it that would secure the support of this House? That is the question that we will be asking, but that is against the background of ensuring that we deliver on the referendum result—that we leave the European Union and we recognise what people were voting for when they voted in that referendum: an end to free movement, ensuring that we could have our own trade policy with the rest of the world and be fairer to our farmers and fairer to our fishermen, but maintain that good relationship with our neighbours in the EU.

Ian Blackford: I am afraid that simply did not address the question. The EU will not renegotiate. The Prime Minister has no answer. She has failed. What an omnishambles from this Government, suffering a historic and a humiliating defeat—the worst for any UK Government. Westminster is in chaos, but in Scotland we stand united. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain, and we will not allow our country to be dragged out of the European Union or brought down by this Tory Government. The Prime Minister knew that this deal was dead since Chequers; she knew it was dead when she moved the meaningful vote; and she knows, as we all know, that last night was the last straw. The Prime Minister must now seek the confidence of the people, not simply the confidence of this House. The only way forward is to extend article 50 and ask the people of Scotland and of the United Kingdom whether they want the Prime Minister's deal or they want to remain in the European Union. The Prime Minister now must legislate for a people's vote.

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows and as I have said before, this House legislated for a people's vote. It legislated for a people's vote that was held in 2016, and that vote determined that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. He talks about "our country". Our country is the whole

United Kingdom—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—and it is for the whole United Kingdom that we will be looking for a solution that secures the support of this House and ensures that this Parliament delivers on the vote of the people.

Q10. [908600] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): On behalf of all the members of the all-party parliamentary group on Kenya, which I chair, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Kenya, may I express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the President and people of Kenya and encourage them in their fight against terrorism?

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Government have rightly committed very substantial extra money to the NHS, and the plan produced last week is very encouraging, but will she look at the difference between the money given to the clinical commissioning groups that receive the least per head and those that receive the most per head? We do not want funding to come down, but we do want a fairer formula for allocating money to the CCGs that receive the lowest funding.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for the remarks he made as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Kenya. I was pleased when I visited Kenya last August to meet some of those who are working to fight terrorism. They are working to bring stability and security to people in that region, and very important that is, too.

I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the long-term plan we have set out for the national health service. The resources allocated to CCGs reflect the needs of the population, including levels of deprivation and the age profile of the population. Changes have been made to the allocations for 2019-20. The fair share allocations for Staffordshire CCGs, which I am sure he is particularly interested in, have increased; they will see a higher level of growth in their actual budgets over the next five years. That difference will ensure that, over time, funding across the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent CCGs becomes fairer. The biggest cash boost in the NHS's history is enabling us to do that, and I hope that will address the issue my hon. Friend raised.

Q2. [908592] **Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): The Prime Minister's defeat yesterday was historic and titanic. Everything has changed, and she has to change, too. Yesterday, thousands of people descended on Parliament Square to demand their say. Nobody took to the streets to demand a Norway or Canada option. When she came to power, she promised that she would give people more power over their lives. If she is not going to give people the power to have a say over this deal, what was the point of that promise in the first place?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman cannot ignore the fact that in the 2016 referendum the people of this country voted to leave the European Union. I believe it is a duty not just of the Government but of Parliament to ensure that we deliver on that. We will be speaking to parliamentarians in my own party, the Democratic Unionist party and across the House about finding a way forward that secures the support of the House, but I say to him again that a vote was taken in 2016 and I believe it is incumbent on this Parliament to deliver on that vote.

Q12. [908602] **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): My right hon. Friend will remember from her visits to Copeland just how capable our nuclear community is and how proud we are of our nuclear heritage. Will she consider meeting me and a small delegation of Cumbrian nuclear workers to understand how important Moorside is to Copeland, and will she bear in mind the solutions that the Centre of Nuclear Excellence can provide to its challenges?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. When I have visited Copeland, I have seen very clearly not only its population's expertise and skills in the nuclear industry but the importance of that industry. The Moorside site will revert to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and we are considering options for its future. The site remains eligible for nuclear new build, and we are committed to seeing new nuclear as part of our future energy mix. It might be helpful if the relevant Minister from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy met her and that group to explore this issue further.

Q3. [908593] **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Last night in this House, after the biggest Government defeat in history, the Prime Minister said that the Government would approach meetings with parliamentarians "in a constructive spirit", but it appears that holding cross-party talks means inviting people in to tell her why her deal is best or to see whether they have any ideas about how to get her deal through. Apparently now, No. 10's resistance to a customs union with the European Union after Brexit was a principle, not a red line. Which is it? If she is genuinely seeking to work with Parliament and hear the will of the House, is she prepared to change any of her red lines and work to bring Parliament and the country together on how we move forward?

The Prime Minister: As I said in the House last night, I will be talking to parliamentarians in my own party, in the DUP and in other parties across this House, looking to see what can secure the support of this House, but I say to the hon. Lady, as I have said to her right hon. and hon. Friends, that what this House must always have in mind is the importance of delivering on the vote of the people to leave the European Union.

Q13. [908603] **Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree with me that if we fail to deliver on Brexit, public perception of politicians in this country will be at an all-time low?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. This is so important. I believe that if we fail to deliver on what the British people instructed us to do in the vote in the referendum, the British people's views of this House, of Parliament and of politicians will be at an all-time low, because they will have lost faith in politicians across the whole of this Parliament. We need to deliver Brexit for the British people.

Q4. [908594] **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): The Prime Minister may have created a Brexit crisis, but other crises are unfolding. Rates of chronic health conditions and obesity in the north-east are the highest of any English region, and people over 65 in Durham can expect only eight years of

healthy living, compared with 14 in Windsor and Maidenhead, so why on earth is the Prime Minister planning to cut Durham's public health budget by a massive 40%? That will not only worsen health outcomes for my constituents but ultimately cost the NHS more and further widen health inequalities.

The Prime Minister: Of course, public health funding will be looked at in the spending review. The hon. Lady assumes that the only action taken on prevention of obesity and other conditions is through public health, but that is not the case. If she looks at the NHS long-term plan that has been announced—funded by the biggest cash boost in the NHS's history, given by this Government—what she will see is an emphasis on prevention and on ensuring that people are able to lead healthier independent lives for longer.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I sat through many hours on every day but one of the recent debate, listening carefully to the extraordinary range of views expressed throughout it by Members in all parts of the House. It seemed to me that the only clear majorities in this House on a cross-party basis are against leaving with no deal; in favour of extending article 50 to give us time to sort out what we now propose to do; and in favour of some form of customs union and sufficient regulatory alignment to keep all our borders between the United Kingdom and the European Union open after we leave. Will the Prime Minister not accept, just as I have had to accept that the majority in this House is committed to the UK leaving the European Union, that she must now modify her red lines, which she created for herself at Lancaster House, and find a cross-party majority, which will be along the lines that I have indicated?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend started by saying that there are a considerable number of views across this House. It is precisely because of that that we will be undertaking the discussions with parliamentarians that I said last night would happen. He talks about the possible extension of article 50. Of course, article 50 cannot be extended by the UK; it has to be extended in consultation and agreement with the European Union. The Government's policy is that we are leaving the European Union on 29 March. The EU would extend article 50 only if it was clear that there was a plan that was moving toward a agreed deal. The crucial element of ensuring that we deliver on Brexit is being able to get the agreement of this House to the deal that will deliver on the referendum result, lead to the UK leaving the European Union, and recognise what lay behind people voting to leave.

Q5. [908595] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): In my constituency, there are colliery rows standing derelict in the villages of Easington Colliery, Horden and Blackhall. They are characterised by low demand and high void rates. Many are not fit for human habitation. They are neglected by absentee landlords and a magnet for antisocial behaviour and crime. Will the Prime Minister commit to providing the funding required for the housing masterplan developed by Durham County Council to fix these issues? If she cannot do that, will she please get out of the way and call a general election and let us have a Labour Government who will address them?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen the housing masterplan that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but of course it is this Government who have put more money into affordable homes and more money into ensuring we are seeing more homes being built, and who have lifted the cap on local councils so that they are also able to build more home and the homes that people want.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): Next month, I and my three neighbouring colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately)—will host our second apprenticeship fair, connecting nearly 40 leading organisations with more than 700 pupils from 22 schools. Does the Prime Minister agree that apprenticeships offer a viable alternative to full-time higher education, while creating a skilled workforce that benefits business and its future employees?

The Prime Minister: First, I commend my hon. Friend for the work she is doing in her constituency through the jobs fairs. I absolutely agree with her: it is very important that young people are able to see that there are different routes for them for their futures and different routes into the workplace. Apprenticeships are an important route for some young people. All the apprentices that I meet say that the best thing they have done is take up an apprenticeship, and that was right for them. We want every young person to be able to take the route that is right for them, be it higher education, further education or apprenticeships.

Q6. [908596] **Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): In the '60s and '70s, 1.2 million Primodos pills were prescribed to women, including three of my constituents. Each dosage was equivalent to 40 oral contraceptive pills. Thousands of babies were born with deformities. A recent Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency review was widely criticised for being a whitewash. Now Professor Carl Heneghan of Oxford University has published a review of the scientific data that clearly shows that Primodos did cause deformities. Will the Prime Minister ensure that any response to the review does not involve the MHRA, as we have no faith in it?

The Prime Minister: This is an important issue that has been raised by a number of Members from across the House. Our priority is always the safety of patients. Ministers are aware of the new study that has come out. We have a commitment to review any new evidence in this area, and we do that, but we do it by consulting independent scientific experts. Baroness Cumberledge is leading the independent medicines and medical devices safety review. That is expected to examine what happened in the case of Primodos and will determine what further action is needed. I assure the hon. Lady that we will listen very carefully to any recommendations that come out of the review, and of course that study will be looked at very carefully to see what has come out of it.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recognise, particularly since last night, that in these complex circumstances, her role as Prime Minister is now to create the political environment in which solutions to the Brexit conundrum can be found and not to continue with a plan expecting a different outcome?

Does she also accept, then, that if she cannot get what she wants, she will need to change her mind to secure public confidence?

The Prime Minister: As I have pointed out today and as I said last night, it is precisely because we recognise the need to understand rather better what can command and secure the support of the House that we will be talking to parliamentarians across the House, and that includes my right hon. and hon. Friends, the Democratic Unionist party and parliamentarians across other parties. That is because, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, there is quite a variety of views across the House about what is right.

Q8. [908598] **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The deal defeated last night is a product of the Prime Minister's own red lines. Which of those red lines is she willing to give up in order to get the compromise she seeks?

The Prime Minister: As I said last night, we will be approaching these discussions in a constructive spirit, but underlying that will be the need to ensure we deliver on the referendum result and deliver Brexit.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I very much welcome the recent statement by the Foreign Office that Britain must do more to support persecuted Christians. In the light of that, will the Government now review their position on the Asia Bibi case and offer her asylum in the UK, so she can choose a safe destination, instead of asking a third country to take her in? That would mean shifting our moral responsibility to another country, which cannot be right.

The Prime Minister: I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend by saying that, as I have said previously, our primary concern is the safety and wellbeing of Asia Bibi and her family. Obviously, the UK's high commissioner in Islamabad is keeping me and the Government up to date with developments. We have been in contact with international partners about our shared desire to see a swift and positive resolution in this case, and a number of countries are in discussions about a possible alternative destination for Asia Bibi once the legal process is complete. I will not comment on the details of that, however, because we do not want to compromise Asia Bibi's long-term safety.

On the timing, I think the Foreign Minister of Pakistan has confirmed that Asia Bibi will remain under the protection of the Pakistani Government until the legal process has concluded, and the Prime Minister of Pakistan has supported the Supreme Court and promised to uphold the rule of law. What matters is providing for the safety and wellbeing of Asia Bibi and her family.

Q9. [908599] **Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said following a recent survey that 4 million in-work workers are living in poverty. Is that not a damning report on nine years of this Tory Government, and will she stop being so hard and fast and call a general election?

The Prime Minister: I referred earlier to figures on the number of people in absolute poverty, which have reached record lows under this Government, but the hon. Gentleman talks about people who are in work.

The Government have taken a number of steps to help those people: we have cut taxes for 32 million people, increased the national living wage and frozen fuel duty. Unfortunately, however, in the case of so many of those measures, which we took to give financial help to people who are just about managing—the sort of people he is talking about—the Labour party opposed them.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In an article I posted on my website in November, I concluded by saying:

“Hopefully we will eventually come to a position that both sides who support the agreement and those, like me, who oppose it can...coalesce. I believe this could happen over coming weeks, though there will be more drama before we reach that point.”

We have all had our fair share of drama, but would my right hon. Friend agree that it is not both sides—meaning remain and leave—who must coalesce around an agreement but the European Union, and may I urge her to continue negotiations with Europe in the hope it will show some flexibility?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for making a very obvious point that has not been raised by those who have been talking about the sort of discussions we are to have across Parliament. I want to see what will secure the support of the House, but of course we have to ensure that it can secure the support of the EU. This is a treaty and agreement between two parties, and, as I said last night, once we have those ideas from the House, I will take them to the EU.

Q11. [908601] **Sir David Crausby** (Bolton North East) (Lab): In March 2010, Greater Manchester police had 8,148 police officers and the chief constable wanted 10,000. By June 2018, we had 6,199, and the numbers are still going down. The incidence of crime is rising right across Bolton, and is it any wonder? More importantly, is it acceptable that the police are failing to attend violent attacks and systematic drug-dealing locations?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, the Government have made more money available to police forces. Nearly £1 billion extra will be available to them next year. But, of course, it is not just about the money that is available to police forces; it is about the power that the police have. That is why we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill, and why we continually take action to ensure that the police have the power that they need to keep us safe.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Further to my right hon. Friend's point of order last night and the questions that she has been asked so far during this session, does she agree that we all need to maintain maximum flexibility if we are to build a consensus around Brexit in the House?

The Prime Minister: As I said last night, we will approach the discussions that we will have with Members on both sides of the House in a constructive spirit. As I said earlier, however, as we are looking at those discussions to find what will secure the support of the House, we must remember that what we are doing is finding a way to deliver Brexit, and to deliver on the vote of the British people.

Q14. [908604] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I do not like to worry the Prime Minister, but it is notable that I asked a question during David Cameron's final Prime Minister's Question Time.

Last night, after the Prime Minister's crushing defeat, she said:

"EU citizens who have made their home here...deserve clarity on these questions as soon as possible."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1125.]

The clarity is in the Prime Minister's own hands, so will she now show leadership, prove that she values EU nationals, scrap the settled-status fee and give a guarantee to all EU nationals that their future in the UK is secure?

The Prime Minister: The withdrawal agreement that was negotiated with the European Union set out the ways in which EU citizens' rights would be guaranteed here in the United Kingdom and reciprocal rights for UK citizens in the European Union would be guaranteed. The vote last night rejected that package of the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration. We have made clear as a Government that in a no-deal situation we will also guarantee the rights of EU citizens who are living here, and we stand by that.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): No country has ever left the EU using article 50, so I do not underestimate the challenge, but back in the real world, businesses up and down the country—with the possible exception of Wetherspoon—are extremely disappointed with last night's vote, and short-term investment decisions are still on hold or going against the UK. Does the Prime Minister agree that protecting just-in-time supply chains, on which my constituents' jobs depend, must be at the heart of any solution?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. One of the things that the deal we put to Parliament last night did was protect those just-in-time supply chain models, and our position on their importance has not changed. As we look ahead to today's vote, we should bear in mind that backing the Government today will enable us to find a way forward on Brexit and on the issues that, as my hon. Friend says, matter at home, to ensure that this country has the Government it needs to take that forward, deliver on the referendum and—as my hon. Friend says—protect not just the jobs of her constituents, but jobs throughout the country.

Q15. [908605] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Wylfa nuclear power station is a £20 billion UK-Japan trade deal that is of vital importance to north Wales, to north-west England and to UK energy policy as a whole. Did the Prime Minister discuss its difficulties with the Prime Minister of Japan last week, and if not, why not?

The Prime Minister: We have been working with Hitachi and with the Government of Japan, and yes, I did raise the issue of the Wylfa site with the Prime Minister of Japan last week. Of course, the company involved will be making a commercial decision in relation to this matter. The Government have been in discussion with it for some time and have been providing support. We do want to see new nuclear as part of our energy

mix in the future, but we must also ensure that the cost of any energy that is provided by nuclear is at a reasonable level for the consumer.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I welcome the recent news from the Secretary of State for Defence and his ministerial team that 45 Commando will remain at RM Condor in my constituency. Zulu Company, part of the 45 Commando group, recently took part in specialist chemical training, which will ensure it is ready to respond first to any chemical or biological attack such as the one we had in Salisbury last year. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the Royal Marines at 45 Commando and all the men and women who work at the base on their tireless work to keep our country safe?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue; she has also raised it in a Westminster Hall debate as it is of importance to her, as it is to many other Members around this House. I pay tribute to all the Royal Marines past and present at RM Condor and I am pleased to say that we do plan for 45 Commando to remain based at RM Condor barracks in Angus. We will ensure that they continue to have the required facilities for them to live, work and train in Angus, and I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Zulu Company on its hard work in keeping us safe.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I welcome the Prime Minister's offer of cross-party talks. She will remember, as we are former colleagues, that my party has a record of working with others in the national interest. However, she should not even bother lifting the telephone to Opposition parties unless she is willing to rule out categorically a no-deal Brexit and is willing to enter into a constructive conversation about a people's vote.

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, there are two ways of avoiding a no deal: one is to have a deal, and one is to stay in the European Union. We will not be staying in the European Union, but I am always happy to have constructive discussions with party leaders who want to put the national interest first. Sadly, from everything I have heard, not every party leader wants to do that.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Driving off a cliff never ends well, particularly if it results in a crash and burn Brexit with no deal in just 72 days' time, but there is a way to avoid this: to be realistic by extending article 50 to allow us to put a realistic negotiated Brexit direct to the British people, to ask if it has their consent and also to include an option to remain with the excellent deal we already have.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear, as I have said this already in today's Prime Minister's questions, that I believe we should deliver on the vote of the referendum in 2016: we should be delivering Brexit. As I indicated earlier to her, she and others have talked about extending article 50, but the European Union would extend it only under circumstances in which it was going to be possible to come to an agreement on a deal. The talks we will be having—the discussions I will be having with parliamentarians across this House—will be aimed at ensuring that we can find a way to secure a deal that will get the support of this House.

Points of Order

12.47 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. First, thank you for your clarity with regard to taking photos in this place. It was put to me this morning by my local BBC station that MPs in this place are not quite getting the seriousness that the country is feeling when they behave in such a frivolous manner. I take that one stage further: we set rules and laws in this place and expect people to abide by them, but we cannot seem to do that ourselves—not a great look. May I therefore ask you, Mr Speaker, not so much for a reminder of the rules we already know are in place, but to say what the sanctions will be for those who break them? If there are no sanctions, might we change the position to reflect the fact that the rules are being flouted?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and his courtesy in warning me of his intention to raise it. I take seriously these breaches of privacy, and that is what they are—breaches of privacy by one colleague against others—which is why I made my statement earlier today. I do not expect to have to apply, or ask the House to apply, sanctions on colleagues for breaches of this sort, but as a supporter of England's finest football club the hon. Gentleman will know that the referee has several weapons in his arsenal before resorting to yellow or red cards and he can be assured that the Chair keeps a beady eye on offenders.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A member of my staff was abused this morning as he sought to come to work. There were no police officers outside the Embankment entrance to Portcullis House. It was not just a random piece of abuse; he was called a “spineless” c-u-n-t. I will not use that word in any circumstances. There is no excuse for abusing him or any other member of staff in that way. Some of us have broad shoulders—I am not going to make a fuss; we all know what happened last week, and I am grateful that the police are finally doing something about it—but it cannot be right that those people are standing outside this place. The man who abused my staff member had been spoken to on three occasions this morning by police officers, but they had then left their post to go somewhere else.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the police who keep us safe, and you know the sort of conversations that I and many others have had with them. I do not doubt that they want to do a good job, but unless the Metropolitan police at the most senior level now do their job and make sure that our staff have exactly the same rights as any other worker in any other business, trade or profession, we will have a situation where our members of staff will simply no longer work for us. Mr Speaker, what more can we do?

Mr Speaker: I was shocked to hear of that incident, and I concur entirely with everything that the right hon. Lady has said to the Chamber today, as I have done on a number of recent occasions. No one should be subjected to vile abuse of the kind that she has described. I hosted a meeting in Speaker's House last week with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, and I referred

to the fact of that meeting in the Chamber, I believe last Friday. I have written to the Commissioner, and I have received a very full and encouraging reply from Cressida Dick. I will not read it out to the House, but she, while quite properly explaining how seriously she and her officers take their responsibilities, went on to seek to assure me of an increased police presence and, to some degree, a changed mindset in terms of the importance of proactive measures. Quite why there were no police officers outside Portcullis House at the time I do not at this point know, but I intend to raise the matter, because it is absolutely vital that the aspiration to achieve security is realised, if at all possible, in every particular case. Does the Leader of the House want to come in on that?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom) *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: No? Not at this stage.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask for clarification? Are you intending to alter the Standing Orders of the House in order to change the way in which business is conducted in the upcoming days and weeks, or are you going to allow those Standing Orders to be changed by a vote of the House? Excuse my ignorance on this, Sir. I ask because if the control of business is taken away from the Government, for example on the issue of Brexit, that has significant ramifications for how we do business in this House and for what is likely to happen in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I can answer him very simply. No, I have no intention of trying to change the Standing Orders of the House. With the very greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for a long time and for whose intelligence I have very high regard, that is not a power of the Speaker. The House is in charge of its Standing Orders, but in so far as he—[*Interruption.*] No, I am not debating this with him. He raised the point and I am furnishing him with an answer, upon which he can reflect. The later parts of his point of order were frankly hypothetical, and I cannot be expected to treat of hypothetical questions. He asked a specific point in the first part of his inquiry, and I have given him a specific reply. We will leave it there.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you agree that the way in which the rules of this House have evolved, and the way in which the current Government have taken to ignoring Opposition motions and not even deigning to vote on them—coupled with the difficult circumstances in which we in the House of Commons now find ourselves in the aftermath of yesterday's crushing defeat of the Brexit deal—demonstrate that our Standing Orders are probably in need of some evolution, even though I understand that you cannot change them? Will you perhaps think about bringing the Procedure Committee into play at some stage, so that we can take back some control from a dysfunctional Government and make certain that the will of this House can be properly put into effect?

Mr Speaker: It is not for me to bring the Procedure Committee into play. However, I am in the hands of the House, and the House can take a view on these matters and may well choose to do so. More widely, I think it is

fair to say that quite a number of Members of Parliament on both sides of the House—particularly some very senior and experienced Members—have relayed to me over the last several months their disappointment, concern and in some cases I would go so far as to say distress that what they previously regarded as givens seem no longer to apply. I simply make the point factually that a number of senior Members on the Government Benches have told me that, whatever they think of a particular vote—for example, a vote on an Opposition motion—it should be honoured, because they are putting their commitment to Parliament in front of their commitment to party. So I put that out there. These matters will be aired in this Chamber, and ultimately decided upon in this Chamber, if Members want that to happen. The idea that that can be blocked—I am not saying that that is what is intended—by Executive fiat, for example, is for the birds.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is entirely understandable that you do not want to answer hypotheticals, but for those of us who are trying to understand what might be afoot and to explain it to our constituents, could you confirm whether it is the custom or the rule that rulings on money resolutions are the sole domain of the Chairman of Ways and Means?

Mr Speaker: I have made the position clear on money resolutions in the past, and I am not going to entertain hypothetical questions. I have tried to be—[*Interruption.*] Order. I am not debating the issue with the hon. Gentleman. He has made a point of raising points of order on a number of occasions, and if he wants to have a discussion at some stage, he is perfectly welcome to come to see me, but I am not going to detain the House now with endless exchanges on this matter with people who really want to stage a form of Question Time—[*Interruption.*] No, I do not require any gesticulation from him; I am telling him that that is the situation.

BILLS PRESENTED

EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM (PREPARATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Dominic Grieve, supported by Liz Saville Roberts, Joanna Cherry, Tom Brake, Heidi Allen, Stephen Doughty, Justine Greening, Mr Chris Leslie, Anna Soubry, Chuka Umunna, Caroline Lucas and Dr Phillip Lee, presented a Bill to enable preparations for a referendum about the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 318).

EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Dominic Grieve, supported by Liz Saville Roberts, Joanna Cherry, Tom Brake, Heidi Allen, Stephen Doughty, Justine Greening, Mr Chris Leslie, Anna Soubry, Chuka Umunna, Caroline Lucas and Dr Phillip Lee, presented a Bill to provide for a referendum about the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 319).

Low-Level Letter Boxes (Prohibition)

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

12.58 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend building regulations to require letter boxes in new buildings to be positioned above a certain height; and for connected purposes.

Thank you so much to all the Members of this House who have come here today to support my Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to improve the health and safety of workers, particularly postmen and women, paper boys and girls and other deliverers. When I met representatives of the Communication Workers Union, they told me that the key issue for their members was not Brexit but low-level letterboxes and dangerous dogs. I am not asking homeowners to retrospectively change their existing letterboxes or replace their front doors. When it comes to front doors, a lot of people are very fond of their knockers. This Bill simply wants to stop developers from building swathes of homes each with a letterbox placed near the ground.

I hope that this will be a moment of unity in British politics. I have been overwhelmed by support from Members across the House. We all need to declare a bit of an interest. We politicians have been known to deliver an occasional leaflet ourselves, maybe. Many Members of this House visited their own Royal Mail sorting offices in the run-up to Christmas. I enjoyed visiting the one in Chelmsford.

Our posties have deep knowledge of and care for their local communities. They are resilient and they are having to adapt to the digital age. These days, they deliver fewer letters but many more parcels because so many people are ordering goods online. There are over 95,000 postmen and women working for Royal Mail. They deliver to 30 million addresses. They serve each of our communities six days a week, every week of the year.

I asked our postal workers what I could do for them, and they asked me to help with the issue of low-level letterboxes, particularly because of the strain this puts on deliverers' backs. Back injury is the primary cause of sickness in Royal Mail. Royal Mail has introduced better trolleys and training schemes to improve how staff lift, but despite this, last year it recorded over 16,800 back-related absence spells. The act of having to bend or stoop to deliver mail to low letterboxes is a significant factor, and it cannot be overlooked. The occasional low-level letterbox is not a big issue, but where developers fit row after row of front doors with ankle-high letterboxes, deliverers face repetitive stress.

Low letterboxes are also associated with an increased likelihood of injury from dogs or cats. Each week across the UK there are, on average, 44 dog attacks on postal workers, and every year there are 50 attacks from cats. Low-level letterboxes are much more difficult for deliverers to see, resulting in more hand injuries and more damage to mail, especially packages. Post that has been delivered into a low-level letterbox is also easier for thieves to steal.

In many cases, it is not until the new doors are already in place that the local postal workers know that they have an issue, and then the trade union takes it up.

[Vicky Ford]

The CWU repeatedly challenges developers to retrospectively change the letterboxes. This is difficult to do, time-consuming and a waste of money. Some of us know that difficult to do, time-consuming and waste of money issues can be somewhat annoying. The union has been campaigning on this issue for many years. Indeed, back in 2005, 97 Members of Parliament signed an early-day motion asking for change, but it did not get much publicity. Well, we are certainly letting our postal workers have the spotlight today.

This Bill has a huge amount of support. I am especially grateful for the specific support from the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) and my hon. Friends the Members for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) and for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid), all of whom have been postal workers themselves. It has been a pleasure to discuss this with the Minister responsible, who has been most encouraging. He is held in huge regard by postal workers for the work he did prior to coming to this place on the issue of dangerous dogs. I understand that the Government may be consulting on changes to building regulations later this year, so I hope the Minister will take the messages from this Bill seriously and make sure that the necessary changes come into force.

Health and safety matters. Sometimes Conservative Members are told that we do not care enough about health and safety or about the conditions of our workers. Indeed, in the past few days I have even heard some Opposition Members say that it was because they were concerned that we did not care enough about health and safety that they would not vote for the Government on the withdrawal agreement last night. But I believe that those concerns are unfounded. Every time I talk to my Conservative colleagues about this, they tell me that they do care about health and safety and do care about the conditions workers face. I hope the fact that so many Conservative Members support this Bill may go some way to assuage the concerns of Opposition colleagues.

Other nations have taken action—Ireland, Portugal and Belgium. There is a European standard, which suggests a minimum height of 70 cm. It is a shame that my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is not in his seat as I point out that in old money that is 2 feet 3½ inches. Not all European standards are evil. On this special day, would it not be nice to find one—at least one—that we can all unite around? The National House Building Council has been recommending since 2005 that developers and builders adopt this European standard. It has also suggested that the European standard for the aperture for letterboxes should be followed so that they can fit in small parcels. However, despite these recommendations, the problem still persists. There are some issues for which recommendations are simply not enough and we need regulation.

Back pain is the most common cause of chronic pain. Those of us who have ever suffered from back pain know how debilitating it can be. Every day our postal workers deliver for us: let us now deliver for them.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Vicky Ford, Scott Mann, Mrs Pauline Latham, Victoria Prentis, Bob Blackman, Tom Tugendhat, Craig Tracey, Mr Edward Vaizey, Richard Benyon, Tim Loughton, Maria Caulfield and Kelvin Hopkins present the Bill.

Vicky Ford accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 8 March and to be printed (Bill 320).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

At this day's sitting the Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion tabled under section 2(4) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 in the name of Jeremy Corbyn not later than 7.00pm; and Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—
(Michelle Donelan.)

No Confidence in Her Majesty's Government

[Relevant documents: Fourteenth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, The Role of Parliament in the UK Constitution; Interim Report, The Status and Effect of Confidence Motions; and the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, HC 1813.]

1.8 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

Last night, the Government were defeated by 230 votes—the largest defeat in the history of our democracy. They are the first Government to be defeated by more than 200 votes. Indeed, the Government themselves could barely muster more than 200 votes. Last week, they lost a vote on the Finance Bill—that is what is called supply. Yesterday, they lost a vote by the biggest margin ever—that is what is regarded as confidence. By any convention of this House—by any precedent—loss of confidence and supply should mean that they do the right thing and resign.

The Prime Minister has consistently claimed that her deal, which has now been decisively rejected, was good for Britain, workers and businesses. If she is so confident of that—if she genuinely believes it—she should have nothing to fear from going to the people and letting them decide.

In this week in 1910, the British electorate went to the polls. They did so because Herbert Asquith's Liberal Government had been unable to get Lloyd George's "People's Budget" through the House of Lords. They were confident in their arguments, and they went to the people and were returned to office. That is still how our democracy works. When we have a Government that cannot govern, it is those conventions that guide us in the absence of a written constitution. If a Government cannot get their legislation through Parliament, they must go to the country for a new mandate, and that must apply when that situation relates to the key issue of the day.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Is not the Leader of the Opposition engaging in a piece of shameless political opportunism, putting party interests ahead of national interests? Is he not simply trying to disguise the fact that he has no policy on this great issue?

Jeremy Corbyn: In 2017, the Prime Minister and her party thought that they could call an election and win it. They thought that they would return with an overall majority, but there was an enormous increase in the Labour vote—the biggest since 1945—during that campaign when people saw what our policies actually were.

When the Prime Minister asked to be given a mandate, she bypassed the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary, pointed out, was designed to give some stability to the Tory-Lib Dem coalition Government to ensure that the Lib Dems could not hold the Conservatives to ransom by constantly threatening to collapse the coalition. The 2011 Act was never intended to prop up a zombie Government, and there can be no doubt that this is a zombie Government.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): If the right hon. Gentleman's motion is successful this evening, there may be a general election in a few short weeks. Would the Labour party manifesto state whether it will be a party of Brexit or a party against Brexit? It is a simple question; what is the answer?

Jeremy Corbyn: We are a democratic party, and our party will decide what policy we fight the election on. In the meantime, however, we are clear that there has to be a customs union, access to European trade and markets and the protection of rights, and there must be a rejection of a no-deal Brexit.

As I was saying, last week this Government became the first for more than 40 years to lose a vote on a Finance Bill. In a shocking first for this Government—a shocking first—they forced a heavily pregnant Member of this House, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), to delay a scheduled caesarean to come to vote, all because of their cynical breaking of trusted pairing arrangements. We need to examine our procedures to ensure that such a thing can never happen again.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you please assist the House, because this is an important matter? I say this as a woman. We need to establish once and for all whether the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) was offered a pair. I think all of us and the public need to know.

Mr Speaker: The Clerk reminds me that that is not a point of order. My understanding is that there was a pairing opportunity, but the issue was aired in the chamber on Monday and again yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely entitled to highlight his concern about the matter, which I know is widely shared, but it should not now be the subject of further points of order. I hope that that satisfies the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Nothing demonstrates the sheer incompetence of this Government quite like the Brexit negotiations. Yesterday's historic and humiliating defeat was the result of two years of chaos and failure. It is clear that this Government are not capable of winning support for their core plan on the most vital issue facing this country. The Prime Minister has lost control and the Government have lost the ability to govern. Within two years, they have managed to turn a deal from what was supposed to be—I remember this very well—

"one of the easiest in human history"

into a national embarrassment. In that time, we have seen the Prime Minister's demands quickly turn into one humiliating climbdown after another. Brexit Ministers have come, and Brexit ministers have gone, but the shambles has remained unchanged, culminating in an agreement that was described by one former Cabinet Minister as

"the worst of all worlds."

Let me be clear that the deal that the Prime Minister wanted this Parliament to support would have left the UK in a helpless position, facing a choice between seeking and paying for an extended transition period or

[Jeremy Corbyn]

being trapped in the backstop. The Prime Minister may claim the backstop would never come into force—
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are courtesies in this place. A Member can seek to intervene, but he or she should not do so out of frustration by shrieking an observation across the Floor.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I was not shrieking.

Mr Speaker: Well, whether we say shriek or yell or bellow or shout, it was very noisy, and it was disorderly. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I hold him in the highest regard and have great affection for him, but he must behave better.

Mr Francois: Isn't the Leader of the Opposition supposed to—

Mr Speaker: Whether an intervention is taken or not—

Mr Francois: All right.

Mr Speaker: No, there is no “all right” about it. The person who has the Floor decides whether to take an intervention. That is life. That is the reality. That is the way it has always been.

Jeremy Corbyn: Who has confidence in this Government's ability to negotiate a future trade deal with the EU by December 2020 after the shambles that we have all witnessed over the past two years? This Frankenstein deal is now officially dead, and the Prime Minister is trying to blame absolutely everybody else.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): In modern British history, when faced with a defeat even a fraction of the size of the titanic and calamitous margin that the Prime Minister faced yesterday, Prime Ministers have done the right and honourable thing and have resigned and called a general election. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister, in the pursuit of power and the trappings of office, has now forgotten what is right and honourable?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. As I made clear, all the precedents are that when a Government experiences a defeat like last night's, it is time to resign and allow the people to elect a new Parliament to deal with the issues facing the country.

Let me be clear that the blame for this mess lies firmly at the feet of the Prime Minister and her Government, who have time after time made hollow demands and given what turned out to be false promises. They say that they want this Parliament to be sovereign. Yet when their plans have come up against scrutiny, they have done all they can to obstruct and evade. The Prime Minister's original plan was to push through a deal without the appropriate approval of this Parliament, only to be forced into holding a meaningful vote by the courts and by Members of this House, to whom I pay tribute for ensuring that we actually had the meaningful vote last night.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): As I understand it, the Leader of the Opposition will allow his party to decide whether he will deliver Brexit should he become Prime Minister. His party has already decided that if he is not successful in getting a general election, he should support a people's vote. If he does not win the vote tonight, will he then support moves in this House to give us a people's vote?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is fully aware of the decision made at my party's conference that all options are on the table for the next phase, including the option to which he has referred.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In this national crisis, will my right hon. Friend confirm whether the Prime Minister has telephoned the Leader of the Opposition to ask for a meeting to discuss the way forward for our country?

Jeremy Corbyn: I have not had such a call as yet. I have my phone on. [*Interruption.*]

I think we should proceed with this debate. The Prime Minister's original plan was to push through a deal without approval, as I pointed out, and she was forced into seeking approval by the courts. Since losing their majority in the 2017 general election, the Government have had numerous opportunities to engage with others and listen to their views, not just here in Westminster, but across the country. Their whole framing of the EU withdrawal Bill was about giving excessive power to the Secretary of State for Brexit at the expense of Parliament. It was a Bill of which Henry VIII would have been very proud.

Yesterday's decisive defeat is the result of the Prime Minister not listening and ignoring businesses, unions and Members of this House. She has wasted two years recklessly ploughing on with her doomed strategy. Even when it was clear that her botched and damaging deal could not remotely command support here or across the country, she decided to waste even more time by pulling the meaningful vote on 11 December on the empty promise, and it was an absolutely empty promise, of obtaining legal assurances on the backstop—another month wasted before the House could come to its decision last night.

Some on the Government Benches have tried to portray the Prime Minister's approach as stoical. What we have seen over the past few months is not stoical; what we have witnessed is the Prime Minister acting in her narrow party interest, rather than in the public interest. Her party is fundamentally split on this issue, and fewer than 200 of her own MPs were prepared to support her last night. This constrains the Prime Minister so much that she simply cannot command a majority in this House on the most important issue facing this country without rupturing her party. It is for that reason that the Government can no longer govern.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister shook her head when I said that she had treated Brexit as a matter only for the Conservative party, yet within half an hour of the vote being announced the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles) commented:

“She has conducted the argument as if this was a party political matter rather than a question of profound national importance”. How right he was, and how wrong the Prime Minister was to threaten him before the vote took place.

I know that many people across the country will be frustrated and deeply worried about the insecurity around Brexit, but if this divided Government continue in office, the uncertainty and risks can only grow.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): When those cross-party talks start, which of the Scarlet Pimpernels will come? Will it be the Leader of the Opposition who campaigns for remain in London and the south-east, or will it be the Leader of the Opposition who campaigns for Brexit up north? We need to know.

Jeremy Corbyn: There has been no offer or communication on all-party talks. All the Prime Minister said was that she might talk to some Members of the House. That is not reaching out. That is not discussing it. That is not recognising the scale of the defeat they suffered last night.

It is not just over Brexit that the Government are failing dismally, letting down the people of this country. There has been the Windrush scandal, with the shameful denial of rights and the detention, and even the deportation, of our own citizens. The Government's flagship welfare policy, universal credit, is causing real and worsening poverty across this country. And just yesterday, under the cover of the Brexit vote, they sneaked out changes that will make some pensioner households thousands of pounds worse off. Those changes build on the scourge of poverty and the measures inflicted on the people of this country, including the bedroom tax, the two-child limit, the abominable rape clause, the outsourced and deeply flawed work capability assessment, the punitive sanctions regime and the deeply repugnant benefits freeze.

People across this country, whether they voted leave or remain, know full well that the system is not working for them. If they are up against it and they voted remain, or if they are up against it and they voted leave, this Government do not speak for them, do not represent them and cannot represent them. Food bank use has increased almost exponentially. More people are sleeping on our streets, and the numbers have shamefully swelled every year. The Conservative party used to call itself the party of home ownership; it is now called the party of homelessness in this country.

Care is being denied to our elderly, with Age UK estimating that 1.2 million older people are not receiving the care they need. Some £7 billion has been cut from adult social care budgets in the past nine years. Our NHS is in crisis, waiting time targets at accident and emergency—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about waiting times at accident and emergency departments and for cancer patients that have not been met since 2015 and that have never been met under the Government of this Prime Minister.

The NHS has endured the longest funding squeeze in its history, leaving it short-staffed to the tune of 100,000 and leaving NHS trusts and providers over £1 billion in deficit. The human consequences are clear. Life expectancy is now going backwards in the poorest parts of our country and is stagnating overall, which is unprecedented—another shameful first for this Government and another reason why this Government should no longer remain in office. That is why this motion of no confidence is so important.

Anna Soubry: The Leader of the Opposition is making some powerful arguments—not very well, but he is making them—but could he help us with this? I saw an opinion poll at the weekend. If there is any merit in his arguments, can he explain why the Conservative party is six points ahead in the polls? Could it be because he is the most hopeless Leader of the Opposition we have ever had?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention, and I look forward to testing opinion at the ballot box in a general election, when we will be able to elect a Labour Government in this country.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right to put on record the concerns about uncertainty in the country, and he is absolutely right to talk about poverty. Can he confirm that it is the position of the British Labour party to rule out a no-deal Brexit? Can he understand why the party that claims to be the traditional party of business will not do the same?

Jeremy Corbyn: I can absolutely confirm that. We have voted against a no-deal Brexit, and apparently the Business Secretary thinks that vote is a good idea. The Prime Minister was unable to answer my question on this during Prime Minister's Question Time. A no-deal Brexit would be very dangerous and very damaging for jobs and industries all across this country.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: I will give way one more time.

Imran Hussain: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He is absolutely right that, under this Government, we see our NHS in crisis and education underfunded. Our communities have been devastated by their austerity agenda. More people are homeless; more people are living in poverty; and more people are using food banks. If the Government disagree, why do they not call a general election? We are ready.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and for his work representing his constituency. On this side of the House, we are determined to force this Government to accept the reality of the defeat last night and to go to the people so that they can decide whether they want a party in office that promotes inequality, poverty and injustice in Britain, or the Labour alternative, which is bringing people together, however they voted in the referendum.

I know that some Members of this House are sceptical, and members of the public could also be described as sceptical, but I truly believe that a general election would be the best outcome for this country. As the Prime Minister pointed out in her speech yesterday, both the Labour party and the Conservative party stood on manifestos that accepted the result of the referendum. Surely any Government would be strengthened in trying to renegotiate Brexit by being given a fresh mandate from the people to follow their chosen course. I know many people at home will say, "Well, we've had two general elections and a referendum in the last four years." For the people of Scotland, it is two UK-wide elections, one Scottish parliamentary election and two

[Jeremy Corbyn]

referendums in five years So although Brenda from Bristol may gasp “Not another one”, spare a thought for Bernie from Bute. However, the scale of the crisis means we need a Government with a fresh mandate. A general election can bring people together, focusing on all the issues that unite us—the need to solve the crises in our NHS, our children’s schools and the care of our elderly.

We all have a responsibility to call out abuse, which has become too common, whether it is the abuse that Members of this House receive or the abuse that is—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. No, Mr David Morris, do not yell from a sedentary position like that. If you seek to intervene, you seek to do so in the usual way—that is the only way to do it. Just because you are angry, it does not justify your behaving in that way. Stop it.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you. Mr Speaker.

Mr Francois: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Jeremy Corbyn: No. I am sure we can all unite in condemning racist abuse in any form whatsoever within our society. Too many of our constituents have faced that since the toxic debate in the last referendum and, if I may say so, the Government’s hostile environment policies on the Windrush generation.

Many media pundits and Members of this House say there is currently no majority in the House for a general election—let the Members of this House decide. However, it is clear there is no majority for the Government’s Brexit deal and there is no majority either for no deal. I pay tribute to all Members of this House who, like the Labour Front-Bench team, are committed both to opposing the Prime Minister’s bad deal, which we voted down last night, and to ruling out the catastrophe of no deal. But I do believe that following the defeat of the Government’s plan, a general election is the best outcome for the country, as the Labour party conference agreed last September.

A general election would give new impetus to negotiations, with a new Prime Minister, with a new mandate, and not just to break the deadlock on Brexit, but to bring fresh ideas to the many problems facing our constituents, such as very low pay, insecure work and in-work poverty, which is increasing. They face the problems of trying to survive on universal credit and living in deep poverty; and the scandal of inadequate social care, which might not concern the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) but does concern millions of people around this country.

Then we have the crisis facing local authorities, health services and schools, which are starved of resources; and the housing and homelessness crisis, whereby so many of our fellow citizens have no roof over their heads night after night. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Francois: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Jeremy Corbyn: They are looking to Parliament to deliver for them a better and fairer society—

Mr Speaker: Is the right hon. Gentleman just pausing?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am pausing because you stood up.

Mr Speaker: Quite right, absolutely. That is very reasonable and sensible. Thank you. I call Mark Francois, on a point of order.

Mr Francois: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it not—[*Interruption.*] Well, give me a go! Is it not often the practice in this House that when someone speaking from the Dispatch Box refers to another Member and challenges them, they then normally take an intervention?

Mr Speaker: It is commonplace, but it is not, in any sense, obligatory.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

If the House backs this motion today, I will welcome the wide-ranging debates we will have about the future of our country and the future of our relationship with the European Union, with all the options on the table. As I said before, a Prime Minister confident of what she describes as “a good deal” and committed, as she claims, to tackling burning injustices should have nothing to fear from such an election. If the House does not back this motion today, it is surely incumbent on all of us to keep all the options on the table, to rule out the disastrous no deal and offer a better solution than the Prime Minister’s deal, which was so roundly defeated yesterday.

This Government cannot govern and cannot command the support of Parliament on the most important issue facing our country. Every previous Prime Minister in this situation would have resigned and called an election. It is the duty of this House to show the lead where the Government have failed and to pass a motion of no confidence so that the people of this country can decide who their MPs are, who their Government are and who will deal with the crucial issues facing the people of this country. I commend my motion to the House.

1.37 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): Last night, the House rejected the deal the Government have negotiated with the European Union. Today, it is asked a simpler question: should the next step be a general election? I believe that is the worst thing we could do: it would deepen division when we need unity, it would bring chaos when we need certainty, and it would bring delay when we need to move forward. So I believe the House should reject this motion.

At this crucial moment in our nation’s history, a general election is simply not in the national interest. Parliament decided to put the question of our membership of the European Union to the people. Parliament promised to abide by the result. Parliament invoked article 50 to trigger the process. And now Parliament must finish the job. That is what the British people expect of us and, as I find when speaking to my constituents and to voters right across the country, that is what they demand. But a general election would mean the opposite. Far from helping Parliament finish the job and fulfil our promise to the people of the United Kingdom, it would mean extending article 50 and delaying Brexit, for who knows how long.

Pete Wishart: The Prime Minister has lost a quarter of her Cabinet and 117 of her Back Benchers want her gone. She has experienced the biggest defeat in

parliamentary history. What shred of credibility have her Government got left? For goodness' sake Prime Minister, won't you just go?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might not have noticed that we are debating a vote of no confidence in the Government, so he has his opportunity to express his opinion in that vote.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): As someone who was defeated last night by only 230 votes, may I encourage the Prime Minister to KBO and never tire of reminding the country that our good economic and one-nation record will be put at risk by a very extreme left-wing and high-taxation party?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I shall speak about this later in my speech, but it is over the years since 2010, with Conservatives in government, that we have been able to turn the economy around, ensure that jobs are provided for people and give people a better future.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I totally agree with the Prime Minister that a general election would solve nothing—it is merely a tactical device used by the Opposition to cause chaos—but does she agree with me that we also need to rule out a second referendum on our membership of the EU, which would be highly divisive and would not resolve the issues we currently face?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that a general election would cause the sort of delay that I have just been talking about. He is also right in that we had a referendum in 2016, and I believe it is incumbent on this Parliament to deliver on the result of that referendum and to deliver Brexit. As regards those issues, the choices we face as a country will not change after four or five weeks of campaigning for a general election, and there is no indication that an election would solve the dilemma that we now face. Not only that, but there is no guarantee that an election would deliver a parliamentary majority for any single course of action.

Mr Francois: I thank the Prime Minister for giving way; unlike some, she is clearly not afraid to debate. It is not exactly a secret that on European policy, she and I have not seen entirely eye to eye—

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): She's taller than you. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Francois: So is everybody else!

It is possible that the Prime Minister and I will continue to disagree, but I am Conservative first and last, and I know opportunism when I see it, so when the bells ring the whole European Research Group will walk through the Lobby with her to vote this nonsense down.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I note what he said and I am happy to carry on discussing with him the different views we have had on the European issue. It is absolutely clear that what the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the

Opposition is trying to do is not going to help to resolve the issue of ensuring that we deliver on Brexit for the British people.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): In 2017, the Prime Minister went to the country and asked for a mandate; she lost her majority. Last night, she asked the House to back her deal; she saw the biggest Government defeat in a vote in the history of this House. She said last night that she wanted to open up dialogue with the whole House, yet she has refused to open up that dialogue with Labour's Front Benchers. Does she agree that it looks like a strategy more to divide and conquer than to bring this House and the country together and work out how we move forward?

The Prime Minister: I said last night that we would be having discussions across the House. There are many different opinions in the House on the issue of how to deliver Brexit; indeed, there are some views in the House on how not to deliver Brexit. I believe that we should deliver Brexit for the people. I made it clear that, should the Leader of the Opposition table a motion of no confidence, the first priority would be to debate that motion. I am confident that the Government will retain the confidence of the House. When that happens, I shall set out the further steps that we will take on discussions with Members from across the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: If Members will just be a little patient, I have taken a number of interventions, so I will make a little progress. I will be generous in taking interventions; I think Members know from the number of hours that I have spent in the House answering questions that I am not afraid to answer questions from Members.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said—it does help sometimes.

We do not even know what position the Labour party would take on Brexit in an election. It is barely 18 months since this country—

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): On that point, will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If my hon. Friend would just allow me one moment.

It is barely 18 months since this country last went to the polls, in an election in which well over 80% of voters—almost 27 million people—backed parties whose manifestos promised to deliver Brexit. That is what the Government intend to do and that is what is in the national interest, not the disruption, delay and expense of a fourth national poll in less than four years.

David Morris: Does the Prime Minister agree that if the Leader of the Opposition himself wrote on a note exactly what he wanted, passed it to the Prime Minister and she adopted it, he would still vote against it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, because of course the position that the Leader of the Opposition took was that however good a deal for the United Kingdom the Government brought back, he would vote against it, and however bad a deal the EU offered, he would vote for it. He has no real national interest in getting the right answer for our country.

Stephen Doughty: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right to call for a general election today, because it is not only the Government's record on Brexit that is at stake tonight. Let me ask the Prime Minister a direct question: is she really saying that her record on policing and crime is one that she is willing to stand on? We have seen more than 20,000 police officers cut since 2010; we see rising crime and rising knife crime; and we see money being diverted, instead of paying for police, to paying for a no-deal Brexit that nobody in this House wants to see happen.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman talks about paying for police; of course, we made more money available to police forces, and what did the Labour party do? Labour voted against that. *[Interruption.]* Yes, that is what Labour did—voted against it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will make a little more progress, then take some more interventions.

Last night, the House spoke clearly, and I heard the message that it sent. I heard the concerns of my colleagues and those from across the House, and I understand them. As I told the House last night and have just repeated, if the Government secure the confidence of this House, my first priority will be to hold meetings with my colleagues, with our confidence and supply partners the Democratic Unionist party and with senior parliamentarians from across the House, but our principles are clear: a deal that delivers a smooth and orderly exit, protecting our Union, giving us control of our borders, laws and money and allowing us to operate an independent trade policy. These are what deliver on the will of the British people.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I tried this with the Prime Minister earlier during Question Time, and I am going to give her one more chance: which of the red lines that she set, which caused her defeat last night, is she willing to compromise on to get the agreement through?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I will give him the same answer as I have just given in my comments. I point out to him that the key thing that this House and this Parliament need to do is to deliver Brexit for the British people. That is what we need to do. We need to deliver a Brexit that respects and reflects the vote that was taken in the 2016 referendum.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am trying to be helpful to the Prime Minister, believe it or not, but this is pure robotic fantasy. It is her deal that has to change, and her deal is a product of the red lines, so when she has that meeting with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), which of the red lines is she willing to give up on?

The Prime Minister: I repeat that we will approach the discussions in a constructive spirit. We want to hear from the House the detail of what it wants to see, such that we can secure the House's support for a deal.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way, unlike the Leader of the Opposition. Does she share my concerns that too many people in this House are trying to scupper the mandate given to us by the British people? For centuries, this House has taken arbitrary power from kings, queens, peers and grandees and put that power in this House for the public good, but it appears that we are now becoming an arbitrary power that is removing the mandate that we gave to the British people. Will my right hon. Friend fight to deliver on that mandate and to protect and preserve our democracy?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts his point very powerfully indeed. This Parliament voted to ask the British people and to say to them, "It is your decision." It was not to say, "Tell us what you think and we might decide afterwards whether we like it." It was, "It is your decision, and we will act on that decision."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

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

That is what we want to do: deliver on the will of the British people. As I have said, I will approach the meetings in a constructive spirit, focusing on ideas that are negotiable and have sufficient support in this House. The aim is to identify what would be required to secure the backing of the House.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): On that point—

The Prime Minister: I will make a little more progress. I have already been generous with interventions.

If those talks bear fruit, as I said earlier in Prime Minister's questions, then be in no doubt that I will go back to Brussels and communicate them clearly to the European Union, and that is what Members asked for. The leader of the SNP MPs said that we should have talks with all the leaders of the Opposition parties and work together in all our interests. The Chairman of the Brexit Committee said that if the deal was defeated, "I would like to think that she would take a bold step—that she would reach out across the House to look for a consensus." That is exactly what I propose to do. It would be a little strange for the Opposition to vote against that approach later today and in favour of a general election, as that would make that process of reaching out across Parliament impossible.

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

The Prime Minister: I will give way to the hon. Lady, as she has risen several times.

Ms Angela Eagle: I thank the Prime Minister for her generosity in giving way. With all due respect to her she has come to the House today, after suffering a very, very large defeat indeed, with the same lines and she is making the same assertions as she was making before the vote—it is as if the vote never happened. Her Downing Street spokesperson said that any discussions would have to start and proceed from the red lines that

she herself established. Does she not realise, in all honesty, that the time has come for her to show some flexibility on those red lines and get us into a genuine discussion rather than just repeating the lines that we have heard for the past five months ad nauseam?

The Prime Minister: What I am doing is setting out what the British people voted for in the referendum in 2016, and it is our duty as a Parliament to deliver on that.

Mr Dhesi *rose*—

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

I know that to serve in government is a unique privilege. The people of this country put their trust in you and, in return, you have the opportunity to make this country a better place for them.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

The Prime Minister: In a moment.

When I became Prime Minister that is what I pledged to do: yes, to deliver Brexit, but also to govern on the side of working people, right across the country, for whom life is harder than it should be and to build on the progress that has been made since 2010.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. The problem is that she seems to be talking as if she lost by 30 votes yesterday and not 230. Her refusal even to consider changing any of her red lines, when the EU, the Irish Government and others made it clear that the deal that she got was dependent on those red lines, is making this impossible. May I ask her to clarify this: is she saying that she will rule out, in any circumstances, a customs union?

The Prime Minister: What I want to see is what the British people voted for—[*Interruption.*] No, this is very important. They voted for an end to free movement; they voted for an independent trade policy; and they voted to end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. It is incumbent on this Parliament to ensure that we deliver on that.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I give way.

Mr Clarke *rose*—

The Prime Minister: If the Father of the House would allow me, I did say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) that I would take him first.

Kevin Hollinrake: I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. She is being criticised for setting and sticking to red lines, but do not those red lines simply represent the promises that were made before the referendum?

The Prime Minister: That is the point that I have been making and repeating. When people voted to leave, they voted for certain things. They voted to ensure that we

could have that independent trade policy and that we would end free movement, for example, and it is our duty to ensure that we deliver on those things.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: I have asked many people throughout this why they voted on one side or the other in the referendum, and I have got a very wide range of replies. I have to say, though, that no one has ever told me that they voted to leave in order that we could leave the customs union, or that they wanted us to erect trade barriers between ourselves and the rest of the Europe. As the Prime Minister is as committed to this as I am, I entirely support her aim of keeping open borders between ourselves and the rest of Europe. Is it not the case that there is nowhere in the world where two developed countries in any populated area are able to have an open border unless they have some form of customs union?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend refers to the fact that, obviously, there were various reasons why people voted to leave the European Union, but when they were doing so they did vote to ensure that we continue to have a good trading relationship with our nearest neighbours in the European Union and also to improve our trading relationships with others around the world. That is what we were searching for and that is what was in the political declaration for the future. That package was not voted through this House last night. I now will talk to parliamentarians across the House to determine where we can secure the support of the House.

Although delivering Brexit is an important and key element of government, it is also important that we build on the progress made since 2010 and lead this country towards the brighter, fairer, more prosperous future that it deserves.

Mr Dhesi *rose*—

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will make some progress before I take any further interventions.

I believe that this Government have a record to be proud of—a record that demonstrates that our policies and principles are more than words. In 2010, we inherited the gravest of economic situations: a recession in which almost three quarters of a million jobs were lost; a budget deficit of £1 borrowed for every £4 spent; and a welfare system that did not reward work. But in the nine years since, thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of the British people, we have turned this country around. Our economy is growing; the deficit is down by four fifths; the national debt has begun its first sustained fall for a generation; and the financial burden left for our children and grandchildren is shrinking by the day. That is a record to be proud of.

Mr Dhesi: I thank the Prime Minister for allowing me to intervene. Under her leadership, this Government have become the first in British history to be found in contempt of Parliament and the first in British history to lose by more than 200 votes on a primary policy matter. Homelessness has spiralled out of control; the use of food banks has risen exponentially, and much

[Mr Dhesi]

more besides. Surely it is now time to act with humility and to do the right and honourable thing: resign and call a general election.

The Prime Minister: May I say again that the whole point of this debate today is to determine whether this House has confidence in the Government or thinks that there should be a general election?

I say that our record is one that we should be proud of, but I know that that is not enough. A strong economy alone is no good, unless we use it to build a fairer society: one where, whoever you are, wherever you live, and at every stage of your life, you know that the Government are on your side; where growing up you will get the best possible education, not because your parents can afford to pay for it but because that is what every local school provides; where your parents have a secure job that pays a decent wage and where they get to keep more of the money they earn each month; where, when you finish school, you know that you can go to university, whether or not your parents went, or you can have an apprenticeship; where, when you want to buy your first home, enough houses are being built so that you can afford to get a foot on the housing ladder; where, when you want to get married, it does not matter whether you fall in love with someone of the same sex or opposite; where, when you have children of your own, you will be able to rely on our world-class NHS; where both parents can share their leave to look after their baby and where, when they are ready to go back to work, the Government will help with the costs of childcare; and where, when you have worked hard all your life, you will get a good pension and security and dignity in your old age. That is what this Government are delivering.

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. I acknowledge that she wants to paint a good picture of her Government, but is it not true that, precisely because so many people were unhappy, they also voted for Brexit? Is it not the case that we need to clarify with the British people what exactly they voted for? We need to put a precise deal in front of them, and not just make a general assumption about why people voted for Brexit. People also voted for Brexit because they were genuinely unhappy with the state of this country, so is it not the case that we now need to put a concrete Brexit deal in front of the people so that everyone can say that, actually, Brexit will make a difference?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady might recall that I made exactly that point when I became Prime Minister—that there were various reasons that people voted for Brexit, but that some people wanted a change in the way in which politics delivered for them. They felt that politicians were not listening to them, which is precisely why it is so important that we listen to and deliver on the result of the referendum for the people of this country—and this Government are delivering in a whole range of ways.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I appreciate the positive, confident and optimistic picture of the future of the UK painted by the Prime Minister. What a contrast with the Leader of the Opposition, who takes every opportunity to talk Britain down.

How on earth can somebody claim that they aspire to be Prime Minister if they have such utter lack of confidence in Britain and the British people?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely. Anybody who wants to be Prime Minister should believe in this country and in the talents of our people; that is so important.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I know that there is so little time to get in all the achievements—[Laughter.] Colleagues may laugh, but it is this Government who are taking the environment more seriously than any other Government. We are putting sustainability first, and that is more important even than Brexit, because if we did not have a healthy environment—our record on this is second to none, including measures on microbeads, ancient woodland protection, the clean air strategy and more—we would be lost.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, who has set out an area on which this Government have been taking important action. I commend the work that she has done and the work of my right hon. Friend the Environment Secretary in this area. We are leading the way on the environment in a number of ways.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am very grateful to the Prime Minister; she is giving way considerably more than the Leader of the Opposition did. She has just mentioned the stewardship of the NHS under her leadership. Would she like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that it is this Government who have just pledged, through the NHS long-term plan, 50% per annum more funding than he pledged at the last general election?

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely right. The biggest cash boost to the NHS in its history and a long-term plan that ensures its sustainability for the future—that is being delivered not by a Labour party, but by the Conservatives in government.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Prime Minister: If right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me, I am conscious that the time is getting on.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab) *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is encouraging me not to take so many interventions and to get on with my speech.

We are building a country that works for everyone, but there is much more to do, including: investing in our industrial strategy so that we are creating the jobs of the future in all parts of our country, not just London and the south-east; delivering our long-term plan for the NHS, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) has just referred, so that our most precious institution is equipped for the future; tackling the lingering injustices that for too long have blighted the lives of too many people, including women being paid less than men, mental health not being treated with the same seriousness and resource as physical health, a criminal justice system that has poorer outcomes if you are black than if you are white, and an education

system that has left white working-class boys as less likely to go to university than anyone else. These are issues that we need to tackle, and the mission of this Government will not stop.

This is a Government building a country that is more prosperous, a country that is fairer and a country that works for everyone. With the confidence of this House, we will go on delivering for Britain, driven by a passionate belief in doing what is right for our country and right for our people, acting not in self-interest but in the national interest. That is the simple mission that has underpinned our approach to the Brexit negotiations.

As we enter the next stage of that process, I have made it clear that I want to engage with colleagues across the House. The question now is whether the Labour leadership will rise to the occasion, but I fear the answer is no. As the Labour leader himself has indicated, Brexit is the biggest issue that the House and the country have faced for generations. It demands responsible leadership and pragmatic statesmanship from senior politicians. The Leader of the Opposition, as yet, has shown neither. His failure to set out a clear and consistent alternative solution to the Brexit question is the third reason that this House should comprehensively reject this motion.

The shadow Brexit Secretary has described Labour's position on Brexit as one of "constructive ambiguity". I think that the shadow Trade Secretary called it something slightly more succinct but definitely not parliamentary, and I therefore cannot repeat it. I call it not being straight with the British people. For more than two years, the Leader of the Opposition has been either unable or unwilling to share anything other than vague aspirations, empty slogans and ideas with no grounding in reality. When the President of the European Commission said that Labour's Brexit ambitions would be impossible for the European Commission to agree to, the right hon. Gentleman simply shrugged and said, "That's his view. I have a different view."

Last night, just for a moment, I thought the Leader of the Opposition might surprise us all, because he told this House that it was not enough to vote against the withdrawal agreement and that

"we also have to be for something."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1109.]

Surely that was the moment. That was the point at which, after months of demanding that I stand aside and make way for him, he was going to reveal his alternative. We waited, but nothing came.

The Leader of the Opposition still faces both ways on whether Labour would keep freedom of movement, and he will not even be drawn on the most basic point of all. In PMQs, I referred to the fact that on Sunday, when challenged on whether he would campaign to leave the European Union if there were a general election, he refused to answer that question five times, and he has refused to answer that question in response to Members of this House today. The Government have no doubts about our position. Under this Government, the United Kingdom will leave the European Union and we will respect the decision of the people.

Chris Philp: The Prime Minister is quite right to point out the yawning chasm at the heart of Labour's policy, but the problem is that she also said that we need

to come up with a constructive alternative. Speaking to colleagues around the House, it strikes me powerfully that there is one element of the currently proposed deal that, if changed, would make it much more likely to pass: the backstop. Would the Prime Minister therefore consider contacting European Commission officials in the coming days and over the weekend to ask them to make legally binding changes to that backstop, which would mean that the deal would then have a very good chance of passing this House?

The Prime Minister: The purpose of the various discussions that we are going to have is to identify the issues that will secure the support of this House, and I will take those issues to the European Parliament.

Peter Kyle: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I am going to make progress so that others can speak in this debate.

Peter Kyle: I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way; she has been generous. She has talked about engagement with this House and yesterday she referred to this House as the "fulcrum of our democracy." May I gently point out that she is the Prime Minister who went to the Supreme Court to stop her having engagement with this House and that the vote that we had yesterday was on the back of an amendment that she voted against? She talks about engagement with this House, but we have experienced nothing but hostility from the Prime Minister. Going forward, will she put her words into action? If not, she does not deserve to have the job in the first place.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has been present on many occasions when I have come to listen to and answer questions from the House. In fact, from October through to December, that amounted to a whole 24 hours spent answering questions in this House.

Vital though Brexit is, there is much more to being the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. That is, after all, the job to which the Leader of the Opposition aspires.

Anna Soubry: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If my right hon. Friend will bear with me, I will make some progress, as I understand that a significant number of Members have put in to speak.

By putting forward this motion, the Leader of the Opposition is asking this House to accept that he could be the next Prime Minister. How would he have faced some of the big challenges that I have faced as Prime Minister over the last two and a half years? When Russia launched a chemical attack on the streets of Salisbury, I worked with our allies to degrade Russian intelligence capabilities and hold those responsible to account. His contribution was to suggest that we ask Russia to double-check the findings of our own scientists. When the Syrian regime used chemical weapons to murder innocent men, women and children in Douma, I stood with our allies to uphold the international consensus that the use of chemical weapons should not be tolerated. He wanted to give an effective veto on action to President Putin and the Russian Government—the very Government who were supporting the Syrian regime.

[*The Prime Minister*]

The leader of the party of Attlee called for the dismantling of NATO. The leader of the party of Bevan says that Britain should unilaterally disarm herself and cross our fingers that others follow suit. The leader of the party that helped to deliver the Belfast agreement invited IRA terrorists into this Parliament just weeks after their colleagues had murdered a Member of this House. His leadership of the Labour party has been a betrayal of everything that party has stood for, a betrayal of the vast majority of his MPs and a betrayal of millions of decent and patriotic Labour voters. I look across the House and see Back-Bench Members who have spent years serving their country in office in a Labour Government, but I fear that today, it is simply not the party that many of its own MPs joined.

If we want to see what the Leader of the Opposition would do to our country, we can do no better than look at what he has done to his party. Before he became Labour leader, nobody could have imagined that a party that had fought so hard against discrimination could become the banner under which racists and bigots whose world view is dominated by a hatred of Jews could gather, but that is exactly what has happened under his leadership. British Jewish families who have lived here for generations are asking themselves where they should go if he ever becomes Prime Minister; that is what has happened under his leadership. A Jewish Labour MP had to hire a bodyguard to attend her own party conference, under the leadership of the right hon. Gentleman. What he has done to his party is a national tragedy. What he would do to our country would be a national calamity.

Anna Soubry: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for being so generous and engaging in a debate. As ever, she could teach a few people lessons on that. The hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) made a very important point. While the Prime Minister has been very generous in coming to this place and answering questions, the complaint is that we have been excluded in a meaningful way at the outset from helping to determine the principles upon which a Brexit deal should be negotiated.

In seeking to be true to our oath and promises to our constituents and voting for things against our own Government, many of us have been threatened with deselection or received threats against our safety and even death threats. I know how seriously the Prime Minister takes that, and I thank her for her kindness in the note she sent me last week. Will she now make it clear to those listening to this that it would be wrong for anybody—this applies also to Opposition Members, given the wise observations she has just made about the state of the Labour party—to be intimidated or bullied in any way simply for coming here and being true to what they believe in and what they believe is in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: What my right hon. Friend experienced last week was appalling. I understand that she has experienced other incidents more recently. I absolutely agree; everybody in this House holds their opinions and views with passion and commitment, and everybody in this House should be able to express those views with passion and commitment and not feel that they will be subject to intimidation, harassment

or bullying. That is very important, and I am sure that that sentiment commands approval across the whole House. Once again, I am sorry for the experiences my right hon. Friend has gone through.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, and then I will conclude.

Liam Byrne: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. She must recognise that she has built a cage of red lines, which produced a deal that was overwhelmingly rejected by this House. We rejected the deal because we rejected the cage. This afternoon, she has yielded nothing about how any one of those red lines will change. If she is not prepared to change, how on earth can we in this House continue to place a shred of confidence in her?

The Prime Minister: The point I made last night and have repeatedly made today is that I will be talking to people across this House—to my own colleagues, to the DUP and to other parties, as there are different groups of people in this House who have different views on this issue—to find what will secure the confidence and support of this House for the way in which we deliver Brexit.

It was serendipitous that I allowed the right hon. Gentleman to intervene just at the point at which I was going to say that if the Leader of the Opposition wins his vote tonight, what he would attempt to do is damage our country and wreck our economy. Of course, it was the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) who left that note saying, “There’s no money left” after the last Labour Government.

Liam Byrne: I was naive to honour a Treasury tradition that went back to Churchill with a text that is pretty much the same, but I was proud to be part of a team that stopped a recession becoming a depression. This is the Government who—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Stop trying to shout other Members down. Calm yourselves.

Liam Byrne: The Prime Minister was a member of the party that backed Labour’s spending plans up to late 2009, and she has presided over a Government who have doubled the size of the national debt.

The Prime Minister: We did see what was happening in terms of the financial crisis and its impact, but the Labour party in government had failed to take the steps to ensure that the country was in a position to deal with those issues.

What would we see if Labour won the vote tonight? It would wreck our economy, spread division and undermine our national security. As I said earlier, on the biggest question of our times, the Leader of the Opposition provides no answers, no way forward and nothing but evasion, contradiction and political games. This House cannot and must not allow it.

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

The Prime Minister: I am about to conclude, so I will not take any more interventions.

We are living through a historic moment in our nation's history. Following a referendum that divided our nation in half, we dearly need to bring our country back together. Last night's vote showed that we have a long way to go, but I do not believe that a general election is the path to doing that, and I do not believe that a Government led by the Leader of the Opposition is the path to doing that either. We must find the answer among ourselves in this House, and, with the confidence of the House, this Government will lead that process.

This is the Government who have already delivered record employment, put more money in the pockets of ordinary working people and given the NHS the biggest cash boost it has ever received from any Government of any colour. This is the Government who are fighting the burning injustices of poverty, inequality and discrimination, which for too long have blighted the lives of too many of our people. This is the Government who are building a country that works for everyone.

As we leave the European Union, we must raise our sights to the kind of country we want to be—a nation that can respond to a call from its people for change; a nation that can build a better future for every one of its people; and a nation that knows that moderation and pragmatism are not dirty words, but how we work together to improve people's lives. That is our mission. That is what we are doing, and, with the backing of the House, it is what we will continue to do. I am proud of what we have achieved so far, and I am determined that the work will go on. In that, I know that we have the confidence of the country. We now ask for the confidence of this House. Reject this motion.

2.19 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the Prime Minister. Of course, I wish her no ill will, and if she does choose to resign today, may I wish her all the best for her future career?

In many respects, we should not be having this debate. If we reflect on what happened last night, we see a Government who brought their Brexit deal before Parliament and lost by a majority of 230—something quite unprecedented—with the Prime Minister's own Back Benchers and the Opposition, in a united manner, voting against this Government. If we go back just a short few weeks to December, there was of course a motion of confidence within the Conservative party and in that situation a majority of Government Back Benchers voted against the Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) said earlier in an intervention that the members of the ERG would be going through the Lobby to support the Government tonight. That says it all. It is the ERG that has captured the Prime Minister.

The reality of where we stand today is that, when the Prime Minister went to the United Kingdom in an election in 2017, in anticipation of getting a majority, the Conservatives got a bloody nose and she came back as a minority Prime Minister. [*Interruption.*] Well, you can only—

The Prime Minister *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I will give way in a moment. [*Interruption.*] I say to those on the Government Benches, if they would just settle down a little, that they would love to be

in the position that the Scottish National party is in because we have a majority of seats from the people of Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I thought perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could just inform the House: how many seats in Westminster—how many Westminster MPs—did the SNP have before the 2017 election and how many did it have after the 2017 election?

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that intervention. I say to her that there are 59 seats in Scotland, the Scottish National party hold 35 of them—a majority of seats—and we have won every election to the Scottish Parliament since 2007. The Prime Minister could only dream of being a situation where she has a majority.

Let us come back to the fundamentals of this. We have a Prime Minister who is captured by her right-wing Brexiteers. The issue is, when you have a minority, you have to be able to work across party. We have a situation where the Prime Minister is beholden to the DUP, but the DUP will support her only in very certain circumstances.

This is not just about the defeat of the Government on Brexit last night. They are a Government who are stuck and cannot get their legislative programme through. They have no majority support in this House. They are a Government who are past their time. If the Government had any humility or self-respect, they would reflect on the scale of that defeat last night. We should not be having this motion of no confidence. The Government should recognise that they have no moral authority. The Government, quite simply, should go.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I think the right hon. Gentleman's speech is a little eccentric because he seems to think that the ERG and the DUP control the Prime Minister. Why, then, did 120 of us vote against the Prime Minister yesterday? If we are in such control, we are clearly not doing it very well.

Ian Blackford: Let me explain. The hon. Gentleman, in supporting a motion of no confidence against the Prime Minister, as he did, clearly expressed that he does not have confidence in the Prime Minister. What the ERG is seeking to do is to make sure that the Government deliver what it wants, which is a hard Brexit—a no-deal Brexit perhaps—against the interests of the majority of the people in the United Kingdom.

Here is the reality. Having listened very carefully to what the Prime Minister has said today, there is no change to the Government's position. The red lines remain in place. I fear that what is really going on is that we have a Government who are seeking to run down the clock, safe in the knowledge that the withdrawal Act has gone through, and seeking to drive Parliament to the margins and to make sure that we do crash out of the European Union, with no deal as a serious prospect. All of us should recognise the risks of no deal that no sane person in this House would support. The Government should unilaterally take off the table that risk to all of us and all our constituents.

Imran Hussain: The right hon. Gentleman must agree that the Prime Minister is a record setter—record levels of poverty, record levels of homelessness and now a

[Imran Hussain]

record defeat: no Government have been defeated by such a majority before. Perhaps not in our lifetime, but does he think that majority will ever be beaten?

Ian Blackford: I would say to my hon. Friend, because he is my hon. Friend, that we see a record level of lack of humility from this Government. He is absolutely right. We have had 10 years of austerity from this Government and people are hurting. We can see that through the poverty figures and the increase in poverty that is forecast. The harsh reality, as we know from the Government's own analysis, is that the economy of the United Kingdom would be weaker in any version of Brexit than it would be if we stayed in the European Union. That is the fundamental point.

I say respectfully to the Prime Minister that I understand the issue of respecting the vote in 2016, but when the Government know that the economic circumstances of their citizens are going to be negatively affected, we have a responsibility to say to the people, on the basis of the information that we now have, "We have a duty to go back to you," because nobody—nobody—irrespective of how they voted in that referendum, voted to make themselves poorer. I say with respect to the Prime Minister that it is shameful that we are not being honest with the people of this country. We need to waken up.

Let us take the announcement from Jaguar Land Rover. I know there are many reasons why Jaguar Land Rover is restructuring—we know it is to do with diesel cars and with China—but, at the same time, Jaguar Land Rover has made it absolutely crystal clear that Brexit is a fundamental issue driving that restructuring. No Government should be in the situation where they want to put unemployment on the table, with unemployment a price worth paying. That is what happened under Thatcher and this Government at their peril will take risks with the economy and the livelihoods of the people in the United Kingdom.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Has not the time come for the country to see that the Tory party—not by its words, but by its actions—is now enacting a policy of moving us towards a no-deal Brexit?

Ian Blackford: I am grateful to my dear and honourable Friend for that point because I have to say to this House and to the people of the United Kingdom, that I am worried—I am really worried—about what we are doing. The risk of no deal is unthinkable.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: With respect, I know many people want to speak and I have to make progress. I will take interventions later.

We have to be honest with people about what these risks are. I can say to this House that we in Scotland want no part of it. If the Government and the Prime Minister want to drive the bus over the cliff, we will not be in the passenger seat with this Government.

We often hear about the travails of the European Union—the nasty European Union—but I can tell the House, as someone who lives in the islands of Scotland, that the European Union has been fantastic for our region.

When I contrast the behaviour of the European Union with this Government, I can see why people in the highlands are right to be angry. The European Union agreed to give convergence uplift funds to our farmers and crofters on the basis of the low level of financial support that was in place. A total of £160 million should be handed over to Scottish crofters. Where is it? It has not been handed over. Where has the Secretary of State for Scotland been in defending the interests of Scottish farmers and Scottish crofters? Scottish farmers and crofters will pay a heavy price for Brexit, and the institution that has been standing up and wanting to support them is not this House or this Government, but the European Union. I know where I will put my—

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I first thank the right hon. Gentleman for letting his party give me a seat in this place, but that is not for today. What he says is quite correct, and he touches on a question I put to the Prime Minister yesterday. So many infrastructure projects in my constituency would not have happened had it not been for European money. Those projects were crucial in halting the terrible drain of our brightest and best who left the highlands and never returned home. That issue remains hugely important to me.

Ian Blackford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I say to him that the people of Caithness and Sutherland gave him a seat in this place. We all serve with the good will and ongoing support of our constituents, which no one should ever take for granted.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Blackford: I want to make progress; I apologise.

I have talked about Brexit. Let me move on to the record of this Government. The Prime Minister talked about delivering a fairer society. Oh my goodness. Those of us who live in the highlands, which was a pilot area for universal credit, have seen the damage it has done to many people in many of our communities. I look at my hon. Friends the Members for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). Day after day, week after week, they have had to stand up and highlight the issues with universal credit, the issues with the rape clause and the issues with the two-child policy. This Government simply have not listened to the damage that has been done. They are obsessed with imposing a cruel and hostile environment for immigrants, their families and their children, and they continue to deny the rights of 1950s women.

When I first came into the House, I was the SNP pensions spokesperson. I lost count of the number of debates I called and spoke in, highlighting the injustice faced by millions of women—women who had worked all their lives in anticipation that there was a contract between them and the state that they would get their state pension. In some cases, women were given as little as 14 months' notice that their pensionable age was going to increase by as much as six years. That shows the heartlessness and the cruelty of this Government, who left many of them in poverty by ripping up the contract—that is what it was—between those individuals and the state. I have appealed to the Prime Minister on many occasions to right that wrong. This Government could easily have put their hand into the Treasury coffers; the national insurance fund sits at a surplus.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is appalling that this Government have slipped out, among all the Brexit news, the news that they are making further changes to pensions? Pensioners with a partner below the pensionable age will have to claim universal credit instead of pension credit.

Ian Blackford: My hon. Friend is correct to highlight that this Government have been sneaking out those kinds of announcements. She is a doughty fighter for pensioners, as she is for young people, and we will stand up in this House for those who are affected in that way.

Kevin Hollinrake *rose—*

Ian Blackford: I will give way one more time.

Kevin Hollinrake: The right hon. Gentleman said earlier that he is worried about economic growth. I share those concerns, but is he also worried that Scottish economic growth is slowing? The Scottish economy is now growing at half the rate of the rest of the UK. What is his party doing about that north of the border?

Ian Blackford: Oh good grief. I have to say that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken. Over the course of the last year, growth in Scotland has overtaken that of the United Kingdom. But the majority of the controls of the Scottish economy do not sit with the Scottish Government; they sit with the Government here in London. We would dearly love to have full control of our destiny in Scotland. One of the reasons we desire independence is that our economic interests simply have not been looked after by Westminster.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ian Blackford: I will give way in a second, but let me just say this. When I look at Scotland in the rear-view mirror over the past 100 years, I see that our population has barely grown. Generations of young people have had to leave Scotland because of a lack of economic opportunity. The Scottish Government are not responsible for that; Westminster is. I am delighted that a report published in the past few days by Highlands and Islands Enterprise shows that, for the first time, the trend has turned around and young people are staying to live in the highlands. That is because of the investment the Scottish Government are making in young people, despite the challenges of the austerity we face from this Conservative Government.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I hope that the motion tabled by the Leader of the Opposition is successful this evening. I was reminded that today is the anniversary of one of the first Home Rule Bills for Ireland, which was agreed by this House in 1913 but defeated in the other place. Yet again—I say this with due deference—the Democratic Unionist party is in control of the Government. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that if the motion succeeds this evening, the Scottish National party will have no truck with any Government funding the Democratic Unionist party and its type of politics?

Ian Blackford: There is a very simple answer to that: yes, of course.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ian Blackford: I have been generous in taking interventions. I need to move on, because I am only on page 2 of my notes. I am sure hon. Members want me to make some progress.

The Prime Minister and the Conservative Government have let us all down. Westminster has proved once again that it can only let Scotland down. The Scottish National party has no confidence in the UK Government. Scotland voted to remain. Let me say that again: Scotland voted to remain. I often hear the Prime Minister and others talking about the national interest. I ask her to reflect on the fact that our nation of Scotland is in a family of nations. We were told in 2014 that if we stayed in the United Kingdom our rights as European citizens would be respected, but this Government have completely ignored the wishes of the Scottish people and want to drag us out of the European Union against our will. They want to take away the rights we have as EU citizens.

It can be no surprise that the contempt shown to Scotland by the Tories over the past couple of years has strengthened and reinforced the case for Scotland to be an independent country. Every reasonable attempt by the Scottish Government to compromise and protect Scotland's interests has been spurned. The powers of the Scottish Parliament have been eroded. This place has taken back control. *[Interruption.]* I hear scoffing from the Tory Benches, but SNP membership went up by 10,000 the day after the withdrawal Act went through. The people of Scotland know that the Secretary of State for Scotland sat and did nothing as Scotland's powers over fishing, farming, agriculture and the environment were taken back, against the wishes of the Scottish Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ian Blackford: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The House is over-excited. Although the right hon. Gentleman is well able to look after himself, he must be heard. Sometimes there is a concerted and excessively noisy apparent attempt to interrupt, and that should not happen.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: They are a curious bunch, Mr Speaker. I ask my right hon. Friend and Members across the House to reflect on the fact that, sure, in 2014 the Scottish people voted to stay in the UK, but two years later they voted to stay in the EU. Those two things are fundamentally incompatible because of the Prime Minister's desire to drag us out, so at some point one will have to give. She might be able to delay that, but independence is inevitable, is it not?

Ian Blackford: It's coming yet for a' that. *[Interruption.]* I hear Tory Members from a sedentary position talking about whether we can demand a referendum. I say to them that the sovereignty of the people of Scotland must be respected. However they dress it up, when the Scottish National party went to the people of Scotland in 2016, we won the election and a mandate such that, if there were a material change of circumstances, we could seek to have a referendum on independence. There is a majority for that in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. In July, this House debated a motion on the claim of

[*Ian Blackford*]

right that recognised the sovereignty of the Scottish people. This House accepted that motion. If and when the Scottish Government come to Westminster and ask for a section 30 agreement, this Government should respect the democracy and the sovereignty of the Scottish people and allow it.

Scotland will never forget or forgive the utter contempt shown for our nation by this Prime Minister and this Government. The right hon. Lady and her Government cannot escape the reality that they have caused political collapse in this country. Hamstrung, this Government are completely frozen in their own failure. We have reached a dangerous impasse. With the clock ticking down, we need to remove this shambolic Conservative Government, extend article 50 and, yes, give the people of the United Kingdom a say.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): As ever, my right hon. Friend is giving a stunning account of the current situation. Does he agree that the Prime Minister has painted herself into this corner? She will have to give on at least some of her red lines, and it is deeply regrettable that she has waited until the eleventh hour to reach out across the House. History will judge her on her deeds, not her words.

Ian Blackford: I absolutely agree. I reflect on the fact that we in Scotland have a Parliament elected by proportional representation. We are used to minority government and having to reach consensus. Indeed, the motion on Brexit that was passed by the Scottish Parliament was supported by the Scottish National party, by the Labour party, by the Liberal Democrats and by the Greens. I say to the Prime Minister: that is how you do it. The Prime Minister has simply misunderstood the challenges of reaching a consensus across Parliament. She is working with her own Brexit extremists and failing to work to build a consensus across this Parliament. If the Prime Minister survives today, she must act now to extend article 50 and legislate for a people's vote.

I must now turn to the Labour party. The Scottish National party was the first to table a motion of no confidence, supported by others—the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green party—and we asked for it to be debated before Christmas. We knew yesterday that the Government were giving active consideration to allowing a debate and a vote today on that motion. The Labour party has been shamed into tabling the motion before the House now—a motion that we should have discussed before Christmas. I welcome today's debate, but on the basis of what happens today, I make this appeal to our friends and colleagues in the Labour party: we have to work together to hold this Government to account, and if we are to do that, we have to recognise the harm that Brexit will do to all our constituents. It is time for the Leader of the Opposition to recognise that there is no such thing as a “jobs first” Brexit.

If we want to protect the interests of our citizens, there has to be a people's vote. We do not have time to delay. The Labour party has to join us in that campaign today. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that all the young people who voted Labour in England in 2017 will pay the price if he does not give that leadership.

Get off that fence and come and join us. Take that opportunity today, and tell us once and for all that Labour will back a people's vote.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I am honoured by the right hon. Gentleman giving way to me, and I am grateful to him. He mentioned the shame of the Labour party. Will he reflect on the shame of the Scottish National party in Edinburgh on a day when college lecturers in Scotland are striking and teachers in Scotland are considering industrial action, when waiting lists are going up and our educational standards are going down? That is the record of the SNP Government in Scotland. Is he ashamed of that as well?

Ian Blackford: The hon. Gentleman used to sit in the Scottish Parliament. I suggest that if he wants to debate devolved matters, he tries to get back his seat there. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. You always have a very amiable disposition, Mr Kerr, but you are becoming a mildly exuberant denizen of the House—dare I say it, in your conduct even a tad eccentric, to deploy the word used by the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)? Now, calm, Zen, restraint. Try to cultivate the air of the elder statesman.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am proud of the record of investment in public services by my Government in Scotland. The situation we face is that of austerity from Westminster. We have taken the hard decisions to ameliorate Tory austerity, but also to invest in our public services. It is the Tories in the Scottish Parliament who want to cut taxes and harden austerity, which will damage the interests of the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland wish to remain in the European Union. We want a country of opportunity, a nation free from poverty, a country where immigrants are welcome and refugees are given refuge. We want a Scotland without austerity, a Scotland where pensioners are paid their fair share and workers have fair and equal pay—a real living wage. We want a Scotland where all children are treated equally, where our health service is protected and valued—a nation that will be healthier, wealthier and happier.

The choice is clear. The United Kingdom is on a path to self-destruction. Without a change of course, Brexit will result in our economy being smaller, weaker and poorer. The Bank of England's Mark Carney said that Brexit had already cost each family £600. That is what has already happened. We know that a hard Brexit will cost each household in Scotland £1,600, pushing struggling families to the brink and, already, poor families into destitution. Without single market and customs union membership, the future relationship can only be a free-trade agreement, introducing barriers to Scottish companies' ability to trade. That will damage jobs, investment, productivity and earnings, hitting the most disadvantaged in society hardest. As we know, people who choose to live and work in this country, on these islands, are net contributors to our economy. If net migration is reduced by a significant number, we will be poorer economically and fiscally. That would be catastrophic, not just for workers but for our economy.

After a decade of Tory austerity, our economy has already suffered enough. The SNP will not stand by and allow the UK Government to ride roughshod over Scotland's future. This Government must go, and they must go today. I have said it before, and our First Minister of Scotland has reiterated it today, that the only way for Scotland to protect its interests and for our nation to thrive is once and forever to be rid of this place, and instead be an independent nation in the European Union.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the level of demand, a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

2.48 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was winding up the debate yesterday evening, she said that our country could ultimately make a success of no deal—although she of course was emphasising that she did not believe that that was the best outcome. That was before the vote. The outcome of the vote a few minutes later is one to which the Prime Minister certainly must respond.

The feeling in this House—432 Members, of whom I was one—is that the Prime Minister's deal, however good she thinks it is, is a bad deal, and I have heard nothing from the Prime Minister that implies that she accepts the verdict given by the House last night that her deal is a bad deal. The Prime Minister was right to anticipate such a scenario. In her Lancaster House speech two years ago, she feared that the European Union would only offer us a bad deal—a punishment deal, as she put it. She therefore emphasised that no deal would be better than a bad deal, and she emphasised all the benefits that come from no deal—including our ability to trade freely across the world and our ability to be able to enter into a new economic model—and from being masters of our own destiny as an independent nation. Those were the benefits of no deal that she set out. Obviously she, like everyone else, wanted to get a good deal. As we have not got a good deal, I plead with my right hon. Friend to ensure that she does not close the option of no deal and, indeed, intensifies preparations for no deal. That is the best way of concentrating the minds of those in the European Union that we are serious about an alternative.

If someone goes into a negotiation and says, "The only alternatives are to accept the deal or stay in the European Union," what will happen? The European Union is holding us to ransom. We need to be saying that we are confident, we believe in ourselves and we can make a great success of no deal. Unfortunately, that has not been the negotiating stance of the Prime Minister and her advisers, and we are suffering as a consequence.

Last Saturday, I had a public meeting in my constituency attended by more than 200 people. A lot of anxiety was expressed about whether the Brexit we have been promised will be delivered. It was great to hear the Prime Minister reasserting her commitment to deliver Brexit, but if she does not deliver that with the deal that was rejected last night, how will she deliver it if she rejects the no-deal alternative? My constituents were worried that they could see the referendum commitment to leaving the

European Union somehow being undermined by the Prime Minister and the Government. That in turn was undermining their trust.

George Freeman: My hon. Friend is making a compelling case that we should go back to Europe and renegotiate. He knows that we are at the end of the process and time is running out. He also knows, and I think regrets, that we are not ready for no deal. Is he not actually making a case to extend article 50 to get the right deal that he will support?

Sir Christopher Chope: No, I am not. Two years ago, we were told by the Prime Minister that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed and that everything was going to be agreed within two years. We now know that effectively nothing has been agreed, certainly as far as the future relationship is concerned. Just trying to buy more time will not solve the problem; we need to leave the European Union on 29 March and then we can have negotiations following on from that where we will be standing on a level playing field and able to stand up for our own interests. We will have called the European Union's bluff. It is trying to undermine our ability to be able to do what we want.

If someone is unsuccessful in a conflict, we expect the victor to impose conditions on the vanquished. What is happening here is that the European Union is seeking to impose conditions on us because we have the temerity to want to leave the European Union. That is wholly unacceptable and the Government's negotiating position has been supine throughout.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): In terms of imposing conditions, if we go to no deal, we will go immediately to default WTO terms, including tariffs on lamb exporters, for example, of 40%, and we will not have a Trade Bill—it will not pass at the moment—to enable us even to do anything about it. Does my hon. Friend not see that there are serious risks in going down that route?

Sir Christopher Chope: No, I will not engage in trying to respond to all the scaremongering. My hon. Friend is good at the scaremongering. Let us recall the fact that our Prime Minister has said that no deal is better than a bad deal. The House of Commons has said that this is a bad deal, so why do we not have no deal and get on with it, thereby delivering for the people the result they wanted in the referendum? Certainly, my constituents are looking eagerly towards the prospect of having no deal on 29 March.

Jamie Stone *rose*—

Sir Christopher Chope: No, I am not going to give way anymore. At a sitting of the Exiting the European Union Committee, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), what would happen on the Irish border on 30 March. It was conceded that on that date there would not be any difference from the current arrangements. That is an example of the scaremongering that is going on about no deal.

I regret that the Government did not prepare more actively and further in advance for the no-deal option, but we must not let them benefit from their incompetence by saying that we do not think we are ready for no deal. We should be ready for no deal on 29 March. That is

[Sir Christopher Chope]

why we need to accelerate the preparations for it. If I asked my constituents whether they had confidence in the Government, their reply would be, “Not a lot, but a heck of lot more than in the Labour Opposition.” They will have even more confidence in the Government if they are confident that the Government are not ruling out no deal and are stepping up preparations for no deal and if they can confirm unequivocally again that we will be leaving the single market and the customs union and that we will not have to have people coming into our country without any control over our borders.

2.56 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who just demonstrated why the Prime Minister’s offer to reach out to every section of the House and every section of opinion on Brexit will not work. There is nothing that the Prime Minister could do, other than a hard Brexit, that the hon. Gentleman would accept. That encapsulates part of the problem that the Prime Minister has to deal with.

During the Prime Minister’s statement to the House on Monday, I said that the statement she had made did not alter the real problems she had: first, she has no majority; secondly, because she has no majority, she has no authority; and thirdly, because she has no authority, her Government are effectively of no use to the country as a whole. I did not quite use those words, but that was what it amounted to.

I have listened carefully to the Prime Minister in the intervening periods, and she has offered nothing that anyone can work with. Had she been in the mode she was in following last night’s vote two years or even 18 months ago, reaching out across the Chamber to different parties and different strands of opinion, it might have produced something different that would have been acceptable to the vast majority of people. Like many others, I voted for article 50 in the hope that we would come up with a Brexit that would meet the expectations and hopes of my constituents. The problem is that the Prime Minister’s deal did not do that. That is why we are now in this position.

There has been a lot of comment about historical precedents in Parliament and how long it has been since a Government were defeated by such a margin. I decided in a conversation I had last night that I would look for other historical precedents that did not relate to Parliament, but to treaties, deals or bilateral agreements. I came across the treaty of Tordesillas of 1494. Even the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) would probably struggle with that one. It was a treaty, effectively, between Spain and Portugal that tried to carve up the rest of Europe and decide who got which colonies. And guess what? The rest of Europe did not agree with it, and it eventually became defunct and was never implemented. I think the Prime Minister’s deal rather resembles that treaty.

The Prime Minister fought the last general election on the slogan that Britain needed a strong and stable Government. We have not had a strong and stable Government since the election, but, after last night’s events, it certainly is not strong, and, given all the

speculation about what is going to happen over the next few weeks, it certainly is not stable. That is why this motion of no confidence is timely and necessary.

I want to take issue with something the Prime Minister said in her speech. I am sure she meant it sincerely, but it does not represent the reality of life on the ground and in my constituency. Justifying why the Government wanted to go on, she said she was fighting against poverty and inequality. It simply is not true. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition went through a long list of problems with policy and the delivery of public services to demonstrate why that was not true, and I will not repeat those. In my constituency—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and I apologise for interrupting him. The Opposition are very considerably disadvantaged by the malfunction of the time-keeping facility. [Interruption.] Yes, I am well aware of that. [Interruption.] Order. There is no need for hon. Members to stand. It is very unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, as I said to the House—yesterday, I think—those who put it right cannot do so while the House is sitting, but it is disadvantageous. I can appeal to the Whips to try to keep Members informed, and in deference to the seniority of the right hon. Gentleman, and in the expectation that he is approaching his peroration, I will happily allow him a further sentence.

Mr Howarth: A further sentence?

Mr Speaker: I appreciate it is difficult, but Members do know the minute situation when they stand. They might not know the second situation, but they do know the minute situation.

Mr Howarth: Mr Speaker, you know I always try to satisfy the demands you place on me, and I will do so now.

The Prime Minister said the Government were fighting poverty and inequality. She might try telling that to the over 8,000 people in my constituency who had to resort to food banks last year. Some 3,000 of the parcels distributed were for children. Does that sound like a Government fighting poverty and inequality? I think not. The Government have run out of ideas and run out of time.

Mr Speaker: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman’s co-operation.

3.3 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate.

I have full confidence in the Government and shall vote against the motion tonight. I have recently been surveying and canvassing in Axminster, Seaton, Tiverton, Cullompton and many of my other towns, and I am amazed at the true support for the Prime Minister out there on the street. It is quite amazing. They recognise that she has taken on an almost impossible job—to actually fulfil the referendum result. There was a people’s vote, and it took place in 2016. It was the largest vote in a generation, and there was a clear majority to leave the EU, and that is precisely what we must do.

Let us analyse this wonderful vote last night and how we got to this massive 230 majority. On one side, we have people on the Labour Benches who have not come clean about wanting to stop Brexit altogether. I must pay tribute to the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists. I disagree with them fundamentally, but the one thing they have done is come out in the open and say they are in favour of remaining in the EU. To those who want to deliver Brexit, however, I must say it is the Prime Minister who can do it.

On the one side, then, we had Opposition Members voting to thwart Brexit. On my own side, we had people who wanted to make sure it was the toughest Brexit ever. Those two lots of people have absolutely nothing in common.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) *rose*—

Neil Parish: I will give way in a minute.

When the Leader of the Opposition stood up at the end and said, “We now need to stay in the customs union,” immediately there were huge groans from my own side, because that is precisely what they did not want.

The Prime Minister has to get this deal through. I very much support the Democratic Unionists over the border in Northern Ireland. We must make sure that the whole UK is treated the same, and so there is work to be done, but would a hard Brexit help the Northern Ireland-Ireland situation? Would it help food processing and agriculture? It certainly would not, because of the huge potential tariffs and problems at the border. I know very well that on the island of Ireland there is a huge mix of processing, from the pigs in the north to the lambs in the south, and with the milk going all the way around the island of Ireland. Let us be sensible and have Brexit, not a people's vote. I give way to the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury).

Mike Amesbury indicated dissent.

Neil Parish: The hon. Gentleman is okay, although he asked to intervene.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Neil Parish: I will.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: It is an honour to give my hon. Friend the opportunity to reflect on the next part of his speech by intervening on him. Does he agree, in the light of the parliamentary arithmetic last night and the vote today, that it would be infinitely better for this country to have the continued leadership of a Prime Minister who has the experience of negotiating so far, because it is only somebody with that experience and knowledge of the detail who can reach out successfully across the House to find a solution to this intractable problem?

Neil Parish: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have a Prime Minister with the experience. We also have a Prime Minister who has stuck to her guns. In fact, she is hugely criticised for having done so. We have a Leader of the Opposition, however, who cannot work

out if he is in favour of another referendum, who is not quite sure how he would vote if there was one, and who does not know, if there were to be a general election, whether the Labour party would take Britain out of the EU or keep it in. Is this a leader who could negotiate with the EU? Certainly not. It could never happen.

We need to deliver. When I talk to people in my constituency, as everyone across the House does, whatever their party, most say, “What on earth are you getting so worked up about?”, “Why haven't you done it?” and, “For goodness' sake, get on and do it!” Why is the Prime Minister wrong and the House right? I voted and campaigned to remain, but I accept the result of the referendum. This House is not representative in any shape or form of the opinion of the people of this country. People might have changed a little. We might have a second referendum, and the result might be 48% to leave and 52% to stay. What would that cure? Absolutely nothing. Let us have a third referendum or a fourth! We have had a referendum, and we need to deliver on that.

I disagree entirely with the Opposition on bringing forward this motion, but I also say, in all sincerity, to my own side: we are the party of government. We were elected to govern this country and so we have to make a decision. We cannot sit contemplating our navels forever instead of making a decision. The idea seems to be just to drive us and drive us to secure the hardest Brexit possible, and it will just about destroy British agriculture. I know that the Brexit Ministers and others are just waiting to pour cheap food into this country: they will want cheap food to be delivered under Brexit, and that will hugely affect our farmers.

For goodness' sake, let us come together. Let us all, as a party, govern the country properly. Let us get a deal, and get out of the European Union.

3.10 pm

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): We have adequate justification for this no-confidence motion in the form of the numbers yesterday night. However, I want to address not the numbers, which speak for themselves, but the arrogance that lies behind them. We are in this position because when the referendum was conducted and concluded, this was treated as entirely a matter for the Conservative party, and the 48%—now, naturally, a majority—who voted the other way were totally disregarded. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's response today featured the same arrogance and unwillingness to listen that has brought us to this point.

We have a very badly divided country, but we need to ask why it is divided. Who divided it? The people were promised—not by the Prime Minister herself, but by her colleagues who, for the most part, have departed from the responsibility of government—things that cannot now be delivered. There are a lot of very angry and frustrated people out there, and whether we have Brexit or no Brexit, whether we have a referendum or no referendum, they will remain very angry.

My view, which I think many colleagues share, is that the mature and British way of dealing with this is to go back and reason with those people, to put the Government's case and to accept the verdict that they are willing to pass on what the Government have negotiated, possibly with variations. However, the no-confidence motion

[Sir Vince Cable]

gives us another route, and, I think, a welcome one. We could have a general election that would help to resolve this issue. If the Leader of the Opposition were willing to say clearly, "I lead my party on the basis that we will have a people's vote, and/or that Brexit will stop," that would provide a clear dividing line which we could debate as a country, rather than engaging in a completely spurious debate about whether we should have a semi-permanent customs union or a permanent one.

My concern in respect of no confidence, however, is not simply about the handling of the Brexit negotiation. The simple truth is that the country has ground to a halt. Government is not functioning. As I have reminded the House, I was part of a Government that did work. It may have done unpopular things, but it worked. Decisions were made, and they are now not being made. Hundreds of civil servants have been taken away from the work that they should be doing to make Brexit preparations. Crises are simmering in the background in housing, the funding of local government, social care, the prisons and much else, and they are not being dealt with. The big mistakes that the Government have made on universal credit and the apprenticeship levy are not being rectified. No effective government is taking place.

However, the problem is not just that there is no government; we are seeing a horrendous waste of public money. I spent five years with my former colleague the present Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove)—who is sitting opposite me—scrimping to make savings of £1 million. The same people are now spending £4 billion on an exercise that has no purpose. Half the members of the Cabinet are saying publicly that no deal will not happen, and we will not use this money. It is a complete and utter waste. I spent five years in government, and I do not think that a single Minister was censured with a ministerial directive. Within the last few weeks, civil servants have started refusing to authorise Government spending because of the recklessness involved in it. We have had confirmation from the Department for Transport, and I believe that there are other cases.

We are seeing reckless financing, and we are seeing damage to the economy. When I left government, we had been through a very difficult time, but ours was the most rapidly growing country in the G7. It is now the slowest. Even the Government now acknowledge that Brexit, however it is done, will damage the economy. So what must happen now? I think that two things must happen.

First, we must have absolute clarity about stopping no deal. Half the Cabinet are going around telling businesses and others that it will not happen, and they are right to do so, but the Prime Minister herself must say that it is a ludicrous, damaging proposition. As for the glib idea that it would somehow be possible to have World Trade Organisation rules, I wrote an article yesterday in my favourite Liberal newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, explaining why it is so absolutely absurd.

No deal must be stopped, and we must then move on to the fundamental question of how we can secure the endorsement of the public for how we move forward.

3.15 pm

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I will support the Government today. This is absolutely no time for a self-serving general election called by the Labour party. What the British public now need the House to do is focus our efforts on finding a route to follow on Brexit.

The challenge of Brexit is not about whether it is Labour or Conservative; the challenge is precisely that Brexit is above party politics, and that is one of the principal reasons why the House has faced so many difficulties in trying to find a route on which people can coalesce. The British electorate have grown steadily more and more tired of some of the dysfunctional party politics that they see in our country, which too often prioritises short-term, press-release politics playing to its core base, irrespective of whether that reflects the position of the British public. Politicians should be able to work across parties if necessary to make the long-term decisions and deliver on the ground for the future generations of the British people.

I may have had my criticisms of my own Government and their strategy on Brexit. I think it was wrong to disenfranchise the 48%, and tactically inept then to disenfranchise the 52% by not delivering the Brexit for which they clearly felt that they were voting. However, all that we have seen from the Opposition is, as one of their own said yesterday, dither and delay. I think that many people, when they look back on this time in our history, will feel that both Front-Bench teams failed to rise to the challenge of delivering Brexit and a route forward.

The reality that we must all understand is that party politics will not solve Brexit. Every single minute that we spend in the Chamber today debating whether or not we should have a party-political general election is a minute lost, when we could have been talking about what kind of consensus there is in the House for some sort of route forward on Brexit—and all the time the clock is ticking down. The big question that we must all ask, and answer, is "How do we, as a Parliament, chart a route?" What I would say to Ministers, and to the Prime Minister in particular, is that this is not her Brexit process. The process on Brexit belongs to all of us. It belongs to our communities, and we must now work together to find a path forward.

That has two clear implications. First, it is now imperative for the Prime Minister not just to talk to the House and to parties, but to listen to what MPs are saying. Secondly, however, she needs to go beyond that and allow the House to vote on the different and clear options that lie ahead, just as we were able to have a meaningful vote last night on her deal. That, ultimately, is how we find out whether there is a consensus on anything.

Many Members clearly feel that delivering on Brexit now means that, if necessary, we should depart with no deal. We should have a proper vote on that to test the will of the House. Others feel that a different version of a soft Brexit—they may call it Norway, Common Market or 2.0—is now the route on which we could find consensus. The House should be allowed to vote on that. Talks will not ultimately clarify the position, but they will risk wasting time that we simply do not have.

I believe that in the end, if it turns out that there is gridlock in this place and that, very much like the British public, we find it hard to coalesce on a single

route for which we can vote, we have to go back to people and ask them—not through a party-political election that will not fundamentally deliver—the question to which we need an answer: which of these three routes forward do they want? Do they want the Prime Minister's deal? The House might have got it wrong and the people want that deal, in which case they should be able to vote it through. Do they want a hard Brexit—getting on with it, leaving on WTO terms? If that is what they want, they should be able to have that. Or do they think the existing deal is the best one we have got? We do not know. This House will not find a route forward, and therefore we should have the confidence to allow the people their say.

3.20 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I rise to support this motion of no confidence because at this critical time in our history I believe we have a Government who are incapable of governing, let alone doing so in the national interest. Never have I witnessed in all my 27 years in Parliament a Government as inadequate and incompetent as this one. I have never witnessed a Prime Minister so inept that she has squandered all personal authority and goodwill, yet like a broken record she continues to insist on her right to carry on regardless.

This is a Government becalmed in a sea of their own troubles and neglecting the country: presiding over increasing levels of poverty, homelessness and inequality, and ducking crucial reforms on social care, leaving millions relying on charity to eat. The deep splits in the Conservative party consume all of its energies, and Brexit is like a black hole that devours all light, out of which literally nothing can emerge.

This is a Government who have failed badly even on their own terms. They have failed catastrophically on Brexit. They have failed to unite a country that their obsession with the EU divided in the first place. They have failed to deliver on the Prime Minister's personal promise to deal with "burning injustices", instead providing us with a parade of incompetent Ministers, unparalleled in any Administration since the second world war.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a telling point. While the Government dither over Brexit, meanwhile back home we face the range of issues she has just talked about: food banks, unemployment and problems with the health service, education and so forth. One of the reasons why we want a general election is to deal with those things.

Ms Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend. This Government are paralysed, dealing with their own obsessions, not with the real need and crucial policy issues in the country.

Yesterday's defeat on the draft withdrawal agreement was a catastrophic loss of the Prime Minister's own personal plan to engineer a hard Brexit in the UK, and it was entirely deserved. The Prime Minister has been humiliated by losing the vote on a plan she devised after little or no consultation with her own Cabinet. She finds herself in this position because of a series of colossal misjudgments that were entirely her own and for which she must now take personal responsibility.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): My hon. Friend is, as always, making an informed and detailed speech. Does she agree that it is only because of David Cameron's botched legacy of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 that the Government are able to ignore the will of this House? In any other circumstances, after losing on the figures of last night's vote, the Government would and should fall.

Ms Eagle: I entirely agree, and some of the imbalances caused by that Government in the way our unwritten constitution works need to be addressed.

The Prime Minister decided to kowtow to her own Brextremists rather than reach out. She tried to exclude Parliament from the process completely. She triggered article 50 without a plan and then called a general election, which shattered her own majority—but of course she is doing her best to avoid a general election now.

The UK is now angrier, more divided and more fearful for the future than I have ever known it, and democracy itself is being questioned. Instead of trying to bring the country back together by reaching out, the Prime Minister has set herself up as the embodiment of leave voters, ignoring those who voted to remain. Yesterday, she even dangerously claimed that she is now the champion of "the people" against Parliament. She has failed to unite the country because her only interest is in uniting the Conservative party, and that has proved to be impossible.

This is a Government who do not seem to understand that demanding that people unite around their own partisan viewpoint can never heal divisions. They are not capable of reaching out, listening, compromising and responding to genuine fears, and as such they are not fit for purpose.

On taking office, the Prime Minister promised to tackle "burning injustices" that made life difficult for those she called "just about managing." She failed to acknowledge that much of the suffering in our country has been caused by the previous Governments in which she was a senior member. This Government refuse to acknowledge that years of cuts in public expenditure targeted most heavily on the poorest have resulted in much of the suffering and burning injustice she promised to end. The Government have issued countless press releases and have held a series of never-ending consultations on everything from social care, restaurant tips and rogue landlords to domestic violence, but nothing has changed.

Instead the country has been presented with a parade of incompetent Ministers who were simply not up to the job: a Home Secretary forced to resign over the Windrush scandal and the "hostile environment", which saw UK citizens treated like criminals and deported back to countries they had left as small children; and a Transport Secretary handing out shipping contracts to a company with no ships and no access to commercial ports, and who presides over the chaos of the railway timetable disasters and blames everyone but himself—a man who cannot even organise a fake lorry jam on the M20. There have also been three Brexit Secretaries in two years, each of them undermined by the Prime Minister, and then there is perhaps the Prime Minister's crowning achievement: appointing the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) as Foreign Secretary—and she wonders why the UK is now a global laughing stock.

[Ms Angela Eagle]

This Government are paralysed by their own obsessions. They have proved incapable of addressing a country crying out for change. It is time for them to go.

3.26 pm

Mr Sam Gyimah (East Surrey) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) hit the nail on the head when she said in her speech that, at a time of constitutional and political crisis in this country, every minute we spend on politics as usual and business as usual is a disaster for this country.

On the issue of Brexit, the Opposition have been completely absent from the field. It seems to me that the Leader of the Opposition has been gambling on chaos, believing that that will present him with the perfect opportunity to get into government and focus on his single-minded aim to introduce a Marxist “utopia” for this country. So on the issue of Brexit, Labour is not a Government-in-waiting; it is an Opposition in hiding.

Brexit is not the only issue, as the Opposition have said today, that we need to be debating. There are certain things that no Prime Minister of this country, irrespective of the political party they represent, should ever do. One of those things is to interfere with the territorial integrity of this country. No Prime Minister has the right to do that. Another thing is that no Prime Minister should side with our enemies or be an enemy of our institutions.

Perhaps we are wondering what the Leader of the Opposition would be like as Prime Minister—and that is important, because anyone who votes for no confidence in the Government is suggesting that he should be the Prime Minister of this country. We need only look at what happened to Labour Members with a dissenting voice. They were threatened by a mob, yet the Leader of the Opposition pretends that that had nothing to do with him. Many of us on this side of the House disagree with the Prime Minister—I am one of them—and we say so in the TV studios every now and again, but at least we can have the confidence that we will never need police protection for disagreeing with her on a matter of principle. That is what has happened in the Opposition.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the first duty of the state is to protect its citizens. Given the Leader of the Opposition's previous comments about not having an Army, and his position on Trident, let us imagine him running this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that our country's security would be completely destroyed?

Mr Gyimah: I will come on to security in a second.

It is not just Labour Members who feel threatened by the mob. Journalists have needed protection at the Labour party conference, and it was one of Labour's own MPs who called their party institutionally racist. Also, 40% of British Jews would consider leaving this country. Why? Because the Leader of the Opposition has spent a lifetime hanging around with the likes of Hamas and Hezbollah.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Gyimah: I need to carry on.

No Prime Minister should be an enemy of our democracy or of our institutions. I was surprised to hear the shadow Justice Secretary say that we needed to ensure that our judiciary represented society. What could go wrong when politicians start trying to make our independent judiciary representative of our society?

The next point is security. During the 2017 general election, when I spoke to people on the doorstep and mentioned things like the IRA, some people said to me, “That was 30 years ago,” or “I don't know the difference between the IRA and the IMF.” Recently, however, we had a test case when Russian agents murdered an innocent person on British soil. In response, 147 Russian intelligence officers were expelled. Smaller countries such as Moldova, Estonia and Hungary also expelled Russian agents from their countries in support of us. To this day, we do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition supported that action. In fact, he said that we should send samples to the lead suspect in that murder case so that they could tell us whether or not they did it. That is very serious, because it sends a green light to every gangster that if this motion of no confidence goes through and the Leader of the Opposition becomes Prime Minister of our country, they will have a free pass. Putin and Assad will have a free pass—[*Interruption.*] Also, it suggests to the western alliance to which we are committed—[*Interruption.*] We are members of NATO—

Naz Shah: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. At the moment, the hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr Gyimah: We are members of NATO, and we believe that an attack on one is an attack on all. We are committed to defending our allies. So what would happen if we had a Prime Minister who was not committed to NATO? The entire western alliance, and everything it is based on, would be completely undermined. I will vote with the Government today on the principle that there are certain things that no Prime Minister should ever do and that we cannot trust the Leader of the Opposition not to do them. That is why we should all vote to support this Government.

3.32 pm

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Since yesterday evening, I have been struck by how many hon. Members have been assiduous in their entreaties that my hon. Friends and I should be present to speak in this debate and to vote in the Lobby in support of the Government, to prevent a general election. Indeed, some of those entreaties have even come from the Government side of the House. [*Laughter.*] Never mind the people in the country not wanting a general election; in terms of indicative votes, I think if people here had a real choice and a secret ballot, there would be an overwhelming majority against a general election.

Be that as it may, we have arrived at this debate in the aftermath of the proposition of the Prime Minister—and it really was her proposition—on the withdrawal agreement being defeated by a record majority. Last night's verdict was emphatic, and it requires lessons to be learned if the Prime Minister is to secure meaningful changes to

the withdrawal agreement. I trust that those lessons will be learned. Our view has been entirely consistent, in that we want a deal with the European Union to achieve an orderly exit from the European Union in March, but the backstop has been fatal to the proposed withdrawal agreement. That needs to be dealt with.

Following the general election, we entered into the confidence and supply agreement with the Conservative party, in the national interest, to pursue the agreed objectives as set out in that agreement. The support that we have secured for Northern Ireland in relation to the extra investment for the health service, education and infrastructure—regardless of constituency and regardless of political affiliation—has been widely welcomed by all fair-minded people in the Province.

On Brexit, we agreed to support the Government where they acted on the basis of our “shared priorities”—that is what the confidence and supply agreement states in terms. For us, one of our shared priorities, of course, is the preservation of the integrity of the United Kingdom and ensuring that we leave the European Union as one country, not leaving part of it behind under single market regulation while the rest is not subject to such rules made in Brussels. So we supported the Prime Minister when she said that she would secure a deal that would deliver on the verdict of the referendum—take back control of our money, our laws and our borders—and ensure that we left as one United Kingdom. We have delivered on our side of that agreement, ensuring that the Government have had the necessary supply, and ensuring a majority for the Government on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and other important legislation.

But on the issue of the Brexit backstop, as this House well knows, we do have a big difference with the Prime Minister, and so do the majority of Conservative Members who are not on the Government payroll, who oppose the Prime Minister’s deal as well. It is because the draft withdrawal agreement breaches the shared priorities for Brexit we signed up to that we have not been prepared to support it.

Now we have this no-confidence motion before us. We believe it is in the national interest to support the Government at this time so that the aims and objectives of the confidence and supply agreement we entered into can be achieved. Much work remains to be done on those matters.

As I said, I do not think that people in this country would rejoice tonight at the prospect of a general election were it to be called. I am not convinced that a general election would significantly change the composition of the House—and of course it would not change, whatever the outcome, the choices that lie before us all. The timing of this motion, as we well know, has got much more to do with the internal dynamics of the Labour party than a genuine presentation of an alternative programme for government.

We will support the Government on this motion this evening so that the Prime Minister has more time and has the space to focus now on acting in the national interest on Brexit. It is important that the Prime Minister now does listen and does deliver the Brexit that ensures that the whole United Kingdom leaves the European Union together.

3.37 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds).

We gather this afternoon to debate the Leader of the Opposition’s motion that he should be Prime Minister. That, I think, will unite the Conservative party more than any other motion, and indeed unite the nation—long overdue after the divisions of Brexit.

If you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, I want to ask, channelling my inner “Monty Python”, “What have the Conservatives ever done for us?” Let us ask, “What has this great party ever done for us?” [*Interruption.*] Hon. Members are right: our record may not pass scrutiny when one thinks about the mess we inherited from the Opposition. We have stabilised the public finances, cut the Labour deficit by 80%, led a jobs-led recovery, creating over 1 million jobs; we inherited unemployment of 2.5 million—[*Interruption.*] The Opposition are barracking because they do not like to hear it, or hear it broadcast to the nation, but the nation should hear it. We have created over 1 million jobs in an extraordinary jobs-led recovery applauded by the International Monetary Fund.

Naz Shah *rose*—

George Freeman: I will give way when I have finished this point.

We have introduced a national living minimum wage, helping over 2.4 million workers. One would think that Opposition Members would cheer that, but no—they are not cheering because they want this election for a different reason. I will continue the list. We have introduced over 3 million apprenticeships, giving a whole generation of non-academic youngsters access to the workplace. We have introduced welfare reforms. While I do not think that we have got those totally right, the Opposition have taken every opportunity not to introduce sensible and positive reforms and work with us, but to vote against every single welfare reform on principle, flying in the face of the public’s wish for a welfare system that is there for those who need it but is not taken advantage of. Not only that, but we have introduced tax cuts for the lowest paid—not the highest paid, on whose earnings we rely to fund public services, but the lowest paid. Some 32 million of our lowest-paid workers have benefited from Conservative and Liberal Democrat-led tax cuts under the coalition Government.

I have not finished, Mr Speaker, because not only have we put in the money to the NHS that Labour promised at the last election, but we have put in more. With £20 billion of funding, the NHS is always safe under Conservative leadership. We have introduced a massive commitment on mental health, for which I pay personal tribute to the Prime Minister. This party, not the Opposition, made it clear that parity between mental and physical health must be achieved.

We have introduced a pioneering industrial strategy that has been welcomed by Peter Mandelson—once a distinguished member of the Labour party’s Front Bench—and I am proud to have played my part in it. We have also committed to spend 2% of GDP on defence and have launched two new aircraft carriers and a new fleet of fighters. That is not enough, but defence is safe in this country. Even on housing, where we have not

[George Freeman]

achieved all that we should, we have built 1.3 million homes, 400,000 of which are affordable—more than the Labour party, which is complaining now, ever did in its 13 years in power. We have also led a renaissance in education, with over 1.9 million children now in schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding—1.9 million more than under Labour. Labour wants a vote of no confidence in this Government, but that is a record of which no one should be ashamed.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a good case for why this should be a vote of no confidence in Her Majesty's occasionally loyal Opposition, but does he agree that it should also be a vote of no confidence in the EU's negotiators, who have continually failed to provide the legally binding annexe on the backstop that would make all the difference to the deal?

George Freeman: My hon. Friend is probably right, but I do not want to be distracted from focusing on the issue at hand.

Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition—our putative future Prime Minister—has broken promise after promise. On tuition fees, he promised a younger generation that he was going to reverse them and then reversed the promise. On debt, he wants £1,000 billion extra in borrowing and spending, taking us right back to square one after we tidied up the mess that we inherited. Mayor Khan has presided over a knife-crime epidemic in London. He talks about it but does not deal with it. The shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, cannot add up, let alone defend the police when they try to clamp down on crime. The truth is that the Labour Front-Bench team are exploiting the Brexit divisions—[*Interruption.*] I hear the heckling from Labour Members. They do not like what I am saying, but they are going to have to hear it if they want a vote of no confidence. I will not dwell on the appalling unleashing of bigotry and intolerance on the Labour Front Bench that has turned a once-great party into a disgrace.

On Brexit, the truth is that Jeremy Corbyn, the Leader of the Opposition, is the Scarlet Pimpernel of Brexit. In the north, they seek him here, the champion of Brexit for the northern Labour seats. In the south, they seek him there, the champion of remain. [*Interruption.*] The truth is that the Labour Front-Bench team, who are heckling me now, have more positions on Brexit than the “Kama Sutra”. Will the real Jeremy Corbyn please stand up? In the pantomime politics—

Mr Speaker: Order. This tendency of Members on both sides of the House to refer to other Members by name is quite wrong. Stop it.

George Freeman: Will the real right hon. Member for Islington North please stand up? To channel my inner Leader of the Opposition, I was speaking this morning to Mark from Castleford on talkRADIO, who said to me that we do not need an election, because we do not have an Opposition, that Labour do not have a policy, so there is no choice, and that we need Parliament to get on and implement Brexit.

By contrast to the cowardice of the Labour Front-Bench team, I want to highlight the bravery of many Labour Back Benchers, particularly the Members who had the

guts last night to stand up for their constituents and vote for a moderate, sensible Brexit. The hon. Members for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and the right hon. Members for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) and for Birkenhead (Frank Field), along with the hon. Members for North Down (Lady Hermon) and for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), knew that if we break our promise to the British people, this place's credibility will be damaged.

Parliament must sort the situation out. I welcome the Prime Minister's conversion to cross-party discussions, and I hope that the real right hon. Member for Islington North enters the room.

3.44 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I rise to support the motion not simply because the Government have made a mess of Brexit, although they have, but because of the damage that they have inflicted on people in constituencies such as mine and to the fabric of our society. Both those things are linked in the character of the Prime Minister, who is so narrow in outlook that she could not reach out across this House to get a Brexit deal that we could all support. Instead, she chose to draw red lines to appease the extremists on her own Back Benches. She talks of the national interest but, in fact, she acts in her own interest of retaining power. Just as she cannot see further than that, she is unable to appreciate the circumstances in which many of our fellow citizens live.

There are people in constituencies such as mine who go out to work every day of their life and are still having to go to food banks to feed their children, because they earn so little or because they are on zero-hours contracts. We see others, too, every week in our surgeries. Elderly people who have worked all their life cannot get the social care they deserve in their old age. A lady came to see me recently who cares for a sick husband, who has now taken on the care of her two grandchildren, both incredibly damaged in their early lives, and who is now denied the adaptations she needs for her home as there is no money left because local government funding has been cut so much. Another lady I have seen is a victim of domestic violence, and she has been asked to take on her two children because it was feared that her former partner was now abusing them. She did, but she is now trapped in a one-bedroom flat because of the scarcity of affordable social housing.

These are not the shirkers and the shysters of Tory imagination; these are people who are doing the right thing and going out to work every day to earn their poverty. That has come about not by incompetence—I could probably forgive the Government for being incompetent—but as a result of the deliberate policy of cutting back the services on which so many people in our society depend. The Government boast of spending record amounts on schools, but that is because there are more pupils. In fact, they have cut spending on pupils by 8%, and by 25% in sixth forms. And who suffers? Those who depend on state education.

Who suffers from the lack of affordable housing? Children who are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and who can neither study to improve their prospects nor even grow up healthy. The Government accuse the Labour party of putting a burden on people's future, but the burden is due to what the Government are

causing now—the lack of opportunities. There is a lack of opportunity to get a decent education, to grow up properly and to make the best of life. That is due to the Government's constant attack on public services.

The Government loaded nurses with the burden of debt when they abolished bursaries. They chose to wage war on junior doctors. They sacked thousands of police officers, prison officers and police community support officers. This was a deliberate policy, and it is not just individuals whom the Government target but whole regions of this country.

Only a Government who do not care about the north could wash their hands of the chaos that is Northern rail. Only a Government who do not care about the north could maintain a system of local government finance that imposes the biggest cuts on the poorest local authorities, mostly in the north. Then they tell them to raise the precepts without knowing that in the north-west 42% of properties are in band A and in Surrey 75% of properties are in band D or above. Local authorities in the north cannot raise the same amount of money on the same rise in council tax. Spending has been totally divorced from need.

I have no confidence in this Government not just because they are incompetent but because they have no confidence and no faith in the people of this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), who has been advised that she will be the first to be subject to a four-minute limit, I have first to announce the results of the deferred Divisions.

On the question relating to energy conservation, the Ayes were 330 and the Noes were 240. Of those Members representing constituencies in England and Wales, the Ayes were 302 and the Noes were 233, so the Ayes have it.

On the question relating to UK participation in the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, the Ayes were 577 and the Noes were 20, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division lists are published at the end of today's debates.]

3.49 pm

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I am very confident that a great future awaits the UK after we have left the EU. We are the fifth largest economy; our judicial system is revered the world over; our time zone allows us to trade with Asia in the morning and the Americas in the afternoon; we have the greatest diplomatic service in the world; and, crucially, nations across the globe want to do business with us, thanks to many of the achievements of this Government since 2010.

To seize those opportunities as we leave the EU, this House and our country need to come together. That will require determination, effort, spirit and compromise—from us all. We need to treat each other with more respect and work harder to understand the different points of view.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I will be supporting this no-confidence motion for a number of reasons. I could go into any of those, be it universal credit or any

other area. One key reason why the Prime Minister has let our constituents down is that this was her plan for Brexit, with her red lines, and she has failed to get it through. Does the hon. Lady not believe that the Prime Minister has to take some responsibility, accept some blame and stop blaming everybody else?

Mrs Grant: That point has been covered on a multitude of occasions, today and in previous debates. I am not going to eat into my time by addressing it, because I have some important and different points to make.

A well-known expression is, "If you're shouting, you're losing." At the moment, many of us, on both sides of this House, seem to be shouting. Like many colleagues, I have witnessed, on a daily basis, taunts and lurid language as I have gone about my business near the parliamentary estate. Sadly, this has been with an ever-present apprehension of a brick being lobbed or someone being punched. As a former domestic violence lawyer, I know too well that when tensions reach fever pitch, as they are right now, it is so easy for a situation that starts with some shouting and jeering to escalate into physical abuse and worse. All this needs to stop.

It is our duty and responsibility, as parliamentarians, to find a solution that ends this Brexit deadlock and delivers for the British people. They need that and deserve it. The answer is not a vote of no confidence in this Government. No one could have worked harder and more patriotically than our Prime Minister to deliver this Brexit. The answer is not a second referendum, with all that division and uncertainty. The answer is certainly not a general election. We were also recently elected and re-elected in 2017. Our job is to take difficult decisions and find answers. That is what we are here to do. Our constituents rightly expect us to deliver. It is for this House to find a solution that works. We must come together. We must stop playing party political games, be willing to compromise and put the interests of our constituents and country first. I will be supporting the Government today.

3.53 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has tabled and secured this motion. I shall of course be voting for it and I hope it wins, because my constituents and the country desperately need a Labour Government. I was proud and privileged to serve in the last Labour Government, and I know what a transformative power for the better a Labour Government can be. We also desperately need a Labour Government to steer this country through and out of the current Brexit crisis. So I hope we win tonight's vote and get a chance to change the Government, but we need to be honest with ourselves and the public. If we do secure and win an election, we will still be facing the worst crisis in our peacetime history, because of the mess the Tories have made of Brexit.

A general election in the current circumstances would, whether we like it or not, be a Brexit election. We would need to be absolutely clear about what our position was and what we would do in government. I have heard some suggestions that we should promise to deliver a better Brexit; given the overwhelming views of Labour members and voters, I am not convinced that that would be a winning strategy. I would hope that we

[Mr Ben Bradshaw]

would listen to our members and voters, and to the country, which is tiring of this Brexit shambles, and either campaign on a policy of staying in Europe or, failing that, promise to try to renegotiate a better deal before putting that back to the people in another referendum.

Let us be frank, though: the likelihood is that we will not win tonight's confidence vote. In those circumstances, it is vital that we all put the national interest first and find some way out of the current crisis. More no-confidence motions, which some have suggested, are not the answer, and the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), was right absolutely to rule that option out on the radio this morning. There is no time for any more can-kicking at this moment of national crisis. We need decisions and we need leadership.

The Government—if they are still the Government after tonight's vote—have the main responsibility here. They do not seem to have learned anything from last night's catastrophic defeat. They are still sticking to their red lines and still failing to reach out to the official Opposition. It is absolutely extraordinary that after the Prime Minister's assurances last night she has not bothered to pick up the phone to the Leader of the Opposition. It is a disgrace. The Leader of the House also indulged in yet more fiction this morning when she claimed on the radio that the Opposition did not have a policy. We do. She might not like it, but we do, and if the Government are serious, they need to talk to the Opposition about it.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman absolutely hits the nail on the head in respect of the Prime Minister. In her response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) at Prime Minister's questions today, she could not even think of a compromise on her red lines. That shows that she really is not in the right mode; she is still in the mode she was in yesterday afternoon, before she was thumped in last night's vote.

Mr Bradshaw: The Prime Minister is in a total state of denial. We are not going to get anywhere unless that changes.

I am extremely doubtful that we have the time or the votes in this House for a renegotiation of the withdrawal agreement along Norway lines, or for any other Brexit alternative, but if people think we do, let us put that to the test in votes next week. If, when all the other options are tested, none can command a majority and Parliament remains gridlocked, the only option left will be to give the decision back to the people, as the shadow Chancellor also said on the radio this morning.

Mr Seely: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Bradshaw: No, I am not giving way.

Giving the decision back to the people also has the advantage of being official Labour party policy, agreed unanimously at our conference. There would be bewilderment and dismay among Labour Members, voters and the wider public, who are looking to us for leadership, if, at this critical time, we failed to provide it.

Let me say one final thing to those in my own party who still fear or oppose another referendum: a public vote to get out of this Brexit mess is also the surest-fire way to secure the general election that we on the Opposition Benches desire, because when the public reject the Government's botched Brexit deal, as they will, no Government dependent on the votes of the hard-line Brexiteers and the DUP will survive.

3.57 pm

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate.

Yesterday was clearly a tough day—a tough day for the Prime Minister and for Government Members—but today is not. By calling a vote of no confidence and looking for a general election, the Leader of the Opposition has proved that his view is what I have always considered it to be: that politics is just a game, and that all that matters is this posturing and the endless clipping of TV clips of him shouting at the Prime Minister. The reality is that people just want to get on with Brexit and get it done. There is no appetite for a general election. There is a huge challenge now. If people continue to think that Brexit is a Conservative problem—that only the Conservatives can deal with Brexit—they fundamentally misunderstand why people voted to leave the European Union. A challenge has been presented to the political class that we must find a way to answer, but to which absolutely no answers are coming from the Leader of the Opposition.

Neil Gray: The hon. Gentleman talks about politics being a game, but all this is more about self-interest. Eighteen months ago, calling a general election was apparently in the national interest, but Government Members now have no interest at all in doing so. Why is that?

Johnny Mercer: The hon. Gentleman knows my views on a lot of what has gone on, including on the calling of that general election, but this is about today—this is a different moment. We are 18 months down the line. Let us be honest about what would happen in a general election. We would not have the normal election between centre left and centre right parties. The Opposition Front-Bench team advocates a hard-left programme that has singularly destroyed almost every single country in which it has been practised. It uses what can only be described as sincerely held dishonesty to claim that it will look after some of the most impoverished people in this country, when in fact it is those impoverished people who will pay the biggest price from a Government who are represented by Labour Members.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no social mobility in bankruptcy and that it is only if we have a prosperous economy that is generating opportunity that we can deliver that kind of social mobility?

Johnny Mercer: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is rank hypocrisy that comes out of Opposition Members when they talk about social justice and equalising life chances—that fantastic phenomenon that, no matter where a person is born in this country, whether it be Manchester, Plymouth, London or Chelsea, and no matter whether they are gay, black, white or whatever, the circumstances of their birth are irrelevant because

their opportunities are the same. That fundamental principle is in no way advanced whatsoever by the hard-left policies of massive government, massive tax, the taking over of private companies and the sucking out of money from the pockets of people who go out and work hard in this country every single day.

David Morris: Does my hon. Friend agree that every Labour Government in history have left the country in bankruptcy?

Johnny Mercer: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We have just had to sit through a bizarre rant from a Member of the Opposition, who is now no longer in their place, who has this idea that people like me turn up in this place to impoverish people in the north and the south-west of this country. It is a repulsive suggestion that plays to the fantasy within which most Opposition Members live. It is a complete and utter load of rubbish.

Naz Shah *rose—*

Johnny Mercer: I will not give way again; I have given away enough already.

I really think that we should stick to the facts. The Prime Minister mentioned that there were 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty, 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty and 2 million children in this country going to good or outstanding schools. These policies have genuinely affected the lowest paid in this country whom Opposition Members pretend to care about. If we look at income tax thresholds, those people are now keeping more of their money than they have ever kept before and the minimum wage has consistently gone up as a result of our policies.

I do not want to get on to the welfare state today, but it is one issue that made me join the Conservative party. I come from a fairly agnostic political space, which, I am afraid, is where the majority of this country comes from. Members may think that everybody is fascinated with politics, but I can assure them that they are not. The majority are agnostic. We had a welfare state that sapped the ambition from millions and millions of young people in this country by making them better off when they were out of work and on benefits than when they were in work. At least we on the Conservative Benches had the courage to try to correct that injustice in this country. That simply will not happen under Labour, which has been bribing people for votes for as long as I can remember. [Hon. Members: Shame!] Believe me, I feel no shame. [*Interruption.*] Opposition Members can shout at me as much as they want, but I feel no shame when they call that out.

We must do better though; everybody gets that. We must work together better and come together under one banner. We need a different approach. Nobody should misunderstand that. I say to the Prime Minister that she cannot keep doing the same thing and expect different results. She must change course, and we must meet the challenge. Politics is changing. We can ride on the front of that wave, crafting something that we can work with, producing policies that then change the lives of those people whom we come to work for, or we can laugh and sneer at it and be changed by events. We must change

with politics. It is an exciting time. We should see Brexit for the opportunity that it is, not the hospital pass that some would make us think it is. It is an opportunity. Let us seize that opportunity and change the country.

4.4 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate.

The essence of our argument was laid out with force, passion and eloquence by the Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister is this afternoon charged with the greatest political failure in modern times. On the most important question that this country faces, she has secured the biggest defeat that Parliament has ever delivered. That alone should be grounds for her to go. How on earth does she think she is going to command a majority in this House when she cannot command a majority on the biggest question of the day?

The truth is—the Leader of the Opposition made this point eloquently earlier—that the Prime Minister's failure of leadership stretches well beyond the failure of her policy on Brexit. It is often said that we campaign in poetry but we govern in prose. For me, the best definition of our poetry was set out back in 1945, when we offered that plan to reconstruct a war-weary nation and win the peace.

At that time we said, “What we need in this country is industry in service of the nation.” Do we have that today? The Chancellor himself is the first to berate the terrible rates of productivity growth in our industry, which are worse today than they were in the late 1970s when we used to call it “British disease”.

We said that everyone in this country should have the right, through the sweat of their brow, to earn a decent life. Yet half the people in work in the west midlands are in poverty. There are now people going to food banks who never thought they would be in this position.

Above all, we said to the people of this country that they should be able to live and raise a family free from fear of want. Well, on the doorstep of this Parliament people are dying homeless, including one of the 5,000 people who have died homeless over the last five years. Many people in this House know that I recently lost my father to a lifelong struggle with alcohol after he lost the woman he loved to cancer, a few years older than me. I know at first hand how a twist of fate can knock you down, but for millions of people in this country, a twist of fate knocks them on to the streets, on to the pavements and into the soup kitchens where I work in Birmingham on a Sunday night. That is not the sign of a civilised and decent country, and it is something of which this Government should be ashamed.

When the Prime Minister took her seals of office, she had the temerity to stand on the steps of Downing Street and say to an anxious nation that she was going to tackle the burning injustices of this country. She said that she was going to tackle the burning flames, yet those flames now rage higher than I have ever seen in my lifetime. She now leads a Government of shreds and patches, and the Opposition say that this country deserves better and that she should do the decent thing and resign.

4.7 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I do not agree with his conclusion in any sense because I think it would be grossly wrong for us to have a general election, but I do agree with him when he talks about some of the very real problems that exist in our country and that we have an absolute duty, as a Government, to start to address properly, ruthlessly in many respects and thoroughly. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is already beginning that work. She is already looking at universal credit to ensure that we are delivering a system that is absolutely fair—not just for the taxpayer, but for the person who comes to rely on universal credit.

I also agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it cannot be right that we live in a country where people in work are relying on food banks. That is wrong. That is not the sort of country that we should have in 2019. Equally, we have a system whereby people in need are given food vouchers and not often cash, which they also might need. Again, that cannot be right, but it is good and right that changes are beginning to be made.

There is another problem. The Government are undoubtedly set on the right course, but they are often being diverted because of Brexit, which has swamped almost everything that we want to do and that I know we can do. There is a real democratic deficit opening up in our country. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) said about the state of British politics and the extremism that is undoubtedly taking over. Anybody who tries to suggest that the Labour party has not been taken over by the far left is frankly living in fantasy land. Anybody who has any doubt about that only needs to look at the comments made on social media by Momentum and all the rest of it. The whole tone of British politics has been grossly diminished.

We all know—let us be honest—that many Labour Back Benchers are in fear of being deselected and fear the far left all the time. More importantly, this country should fear the far left, who have taken over the Front Bench of the Labour party. Goodness help us if they ever get into government, because they would undoubtedly cause the most appalling damage, especially to our economy.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Anna Soubry: Of course I will take the extra minute.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Lady talked at the beginning of her speech about fairness. I would suggest that the problem is not so much fairness as resources. There are plenty of resources in this country; it is the distribution of resources that is the problem. That is why the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) is in the soup kitchens of Birmingham on a Sunday night—because of the inadequate fairness of distribution of resources in the UK. That is why people reached to Brexit. That is why people are looking to weird places in the far left.

Anna Soubry: I do not agree with that analysis at all. The problem is that if we do not get the economy of our country sorted out and we do not have a strong economy,

we do not have the money to pay for the services that we need. We know that we need to tackle the greater problems, such as the fact that there is almost a crisis in social care, but there are no magic money trees. The great danger—I would say this, given my views on Brexit—is if we do not get Brexit right, and we know what the consequences of Brexit will be, whichever way we cut it, because the Treasury analysis has told us: it will make our country's fortunes less prosperous, and it will not be good for the economy of this country.

I want to return to the problem about democracy, because I am concerned. Everybody has almost given up on the Labour party, but my party also has to get it right. The Prime Minister has done her best; I do not doubt that for one moment. However, she had many opportunities—Members on both sides of the House have talked about this, and I did earlier today—at the outset to reach out, especially to the 48%, and ensure that she formed a consensus at the beginning, working across the parties.

There was undoubtedly a time when we could have got a consensus and a majority in this place, but unfortunately the Prime Minister pandered to a part of my party that has been there for a very long time, banging on about Europe. In my opinion, they do not represent the moderate, one nation, pragmatic Conservative party that I joined. Unfortunately, she has pandered to that side of my party, with great harm to our party, because if we ever lose that centrist, sensible, moderate, pragmatic, one nation conservatism, we will not succeed in winning again, especially among young people. I hope the Prime Minister changes her tone. The problem is her deal. If she wants to get Brexit sorted and deliver it, she has to change her deal, rub out her red lines and work with everybody.

4.13 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I think it is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), although I completely disagree with the lines she peddled about my party.

We all came to this place knowing that each of us has been given a mandate to represent the communities that elected us. No one party won the general election in 2017, but the Prime Minister was clearly able to command a functioning majority in the House of Commons, and we have all had to acknowledge that reality. I did not expect much from a Prime Minister who had promised a dementia tax, more grammar schools and an end to the ban on foxhunting, but I did have some hope that there were at least one or two policy areas where we might be able to park our party politics and begin to address the issues that matter most to the communities we represent.

For example, I know there are Conservative Members who share my concerns about funding for our schools. The Prime Minister included funding for our schools as a priority in her foreword to the Conservative party manifesto in 2017, which also committed to a real-terms increase in funding for our schools. Yet this Government have replaced one unfair schools funding formula with another, leaving schools in Crewe and Nantwich among the lowest-funded in the country. Cuts have meant that headteachers are using the pupil premium to keep their budgets afloat and parents are being asked by cash-strapped schools to pay for teaching resources.

I welcomed the commitment to tackle unfair executive pay and, to quote the Prime Minister, to build a “Britain in which work pays”.

Yet while CEOs have managed to scoop themselves an average 11% hike in their pay this year, ordinary working people’s real wages remain lower than where they were in 2010, and millions of working families are set to be worse off under the Government’s deeply flawed universal credit system.

During the 2017 election, I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister promise to fix what she admitted was a broken care system and to bring forward a social care Green Paper. In July of that year, the Government said that

“we cannot wait any longer—we need to get on with this”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 6 July 2017; Vol. 783, c. 987.*]

By the time we got to November, they told us that it would be here by the following summer. By the time we got to the summer, they told us to expect it in the autumn, and then, before the end of the year. We are a long way from 2017, when it was first promised, and there is still no sign of a Green Paper. In the meantime, care providers in Crewe and Nantwich have been placed in special measures, care workers have been all but ignored and the elderly and most vulnerable in our communities have been neglected by this Government, while they have pulled themselves apart over Brexit.

This Government have not just failed people in the way they have handled the Brexit negotiations. They have failed on the economy; they have failed on our public services; and they have been riding roughshod over Parliament, repeatedly ignoring the expressed view of this House. I am sure there are Conservative Members who will be deeply disappointed with this Government’s record. They get the casework and they see what effect this Government’s policies have on their constituents, and they should not vote against this motion out of self-preservation.

This is not simply about the Government pursuing policies that I disagree with or failing to meet my expectations; this is about a Government who are not even coming close to delivering on their own promises. What is more, we have seen more than once that the Prime Minister cannot command a majority in the House, and we have got to break this Brexit deadlock. This Government have failed our communities and left a trail of broken promises in their wake. I think it is time we gave those we represent a chance to turn their back on these failed policies, just as this Government have turned their back on their future.

4.17 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith). I rise to make a short contribution simply to state that I have full confidence in this Conservative and Unionist Government.

I also have full confidence in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She personifies duty. She is a patriot and a servant of our country and its people. She is a woman of integrity. She continues to serve the national interest with all diligence and is leading a Government who are dedicated to serving our national interest. We should be under no illusions. She was given the toughest job ever handed to a peacetime Prime Minister:

she has been asked to circle an impossible square. However, I have every confidence that, under her leadership, we will honour the instruction of the British people and leave the European Union in an orderly and managed way.

We must not lose sight of the real achievements of the past nine years of Conservative-led Government. The mess that Labour Members left—they always leave a mess behind them—is being cleared up. The deficit is down by four fifths. The public finances are being restored. The hard work of the British people is paying off. One thousand new jobs have been created every single day of this Government. Employment is at record levels and unemployment at a record low, and there is real growth in household earnings. We are delivering on our promise to make the United Kingdom the best country in the world in which to set up and scale up a business. We have the right approach.

Naz Shah: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm—it escapes me—whether the Conservative party manifesto also said, “We will increase food banks, increase child poverty and cut education funding in real terms.”?

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely not. We have the right approach to industrial strategy, the right approach to clean energy strategy and the right approach to new and evolving technologies. This Government are tackling the grand challenges of our times. We are on the side of our people and our planet. We are rolling out the most important reform of welfare services ever undertaken; we are investing in our NHS for the future; and we are resolved never to compromise on the defence of the realm against the background of an evolving threat to our freedom. We have a proud record of delivering practical help to the poorest people on the planet. In my constituency, this Government have delivered on a £90 million city deal, providing a bright economic future for everyone in our city and district.

Beyond that, we have a Prime Minister who believes in the Union. That is core to who I am and what I stand for. Her belief is heartfelt. Other people may have the words, but she has the conviction, and her Government are committed to strengthening the Union. I remind colleagues—we must never forget this—that the nationalists and socialists on the Opposition Benches are waiting in the wings, and we have a duty to our country never to allow them anywhere near the seat of government.

4.21 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I wish the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) were still in his place, because we would have the kind of clash of opinion we want in this House. He suggests that when Opposition Members talk about child poverty, say it is an absolute horror to walk past homeless people on the street as we walk into Parliament and point out that this Government drive people to food banks as public policy—the Government see food banks not as charities run by good people as volunteers but as a matter of public policy—they advocate a hard-left programme. I will tell him something: if that is a hard-left programme, I will stand on it in my constituency and across the country. We are not frightened of saying that; we are not frightened of saying we believe this country deserves better; and we are not frightened of saying we can do better.

[Vernon Coaker]

I want to come on to Brexit, but let me first say this. I accept that Government Members are not uncaring about homelessness—I would not suggest that for one moment—but it is an indictment of the Government that school pupils cannot get the special needs support they want and that people in hospitals cannot get the care they want. Those things do not land from the moon. They do not just happen. They are a consequence of the policies people in this House voted for.

Alex Chalk *rose—*

Mr Seely *rose—*

Vernon Coaker: I will not give way, because loads of people want to speak and I want to be fair to them.

It is only because of those policies that those things happen. People across the country realise that. I will stand on what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition says is important for this country—I am perfectly happy to do that—but I will also list the voting record of every single Conservative Member and tell the people of this country what they voted for. We see the consequences of those policies every single day.

Let me just say this with respect to the Prime Minister. We are debating a motion of no confidence, which is not likely to be passed. It is a constitutional and political dilemma for this country that we as a House are going to say we have confidence in a Prime Minister we have no confidence in. This is a complete and utter constitutional fiasco. The majority yesterday was 230, yet the Prime Minister clings on. She says she is the person to deliver a Brexit. I think there is a parliamentary majority for a sensible way forward, but we do not have a Prime Minister who can deliver that parliamentary majority. That is the problem she has: she is in hock to a part of her party that prevents her from building consensus across Parliament.

I wonder what the result of the vote tonight would be if the motion before us was one of no confidence in the Prime Minister's ability to deliver the Brexit this country needs or to take this country forward. For many, such a motion, rather than one of general no confidence in the Government, would pose a real dilemma. The Prime Minister needs to reach out. She needs to build consensus, starting with Labour Front Benchers and other parties in Parliament. In that way, she might be able to bring the country together and take us forward in a united way.

4.25 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I am a former soldier. During my military career, we were given an aim and an execution to carry out that aim. The Government were given an aim by the people of this country—to leave the EU. The execution of that aim has, sadly, gone wrong for many reasons. I will not stand here today and overly criticise my Government, although I will make one point. I wish some Members on the Treasury Bench would stop accusing the likes of me of perhaps ruining Brexit. That is not my aim. I voted against the Government last night because the deal is not in the national interest and would not deliver Brexit. It would keep us half in, half out, with no one in the room to stand up for our country. There were many other reasons, including the backstop.

In my humble opinion, the problem we have is that there is a disconnect. Today, I have heard many hon. Members on both sides of the House give perfectly reasonable speeches responding to the vote last night, which was a huge defeat for the Government, but what I have also heard is that, in most cases, there is no consensus in this House on following through on what the people of this country told us to do. We were told to leave the EU, and in the vote last night—a catastrophic defeat—117 of my colleagues voted against the Government. The rest of those who voted against the Government—the majority of them—did so for a number reasons. Some do not want Brexit at all; some want a second referendum; some want a general election.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my hon. Friend share my concern about asking for a second referendum? Why should anyone trust referendums or any electoral process if, when we are given a mandate to do something, we do not follow it through?

Richard Drax: I agree, and in my short speech on Monday I made exactly that point. How can any of us go to our constituency with our political manifesto and tell people, “This is what we are going to do,” when quite clearly we do not do what we say we are going to do? Who in this country will believe us?

This debate is not about personal views. The personal views of Members are hugely diverse and different, and I respect that. There are 650 of us, and I suspect that every right hon. or hon. Member has a view on something, but the people of this country, to whom we gave a vote, told us to execute leaving the EU.

What to do next? I have great sympathy for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She has been handed a can of worms—an extremely difficult issue which I suspect no one in this House could manage either better or worse. However, may I suggest that she gets back on her feet and deals more firmly with the EU? I believe that if we, as the United Kingdom, had stood like a rock to say, “We want a deal—of course we do. We want to be your friends and your allies, but we want to be in charge of our destiny,” the EU would by now have said, “We hear you. You are one of our major trading partners. Of course we want to deal with you and remain friends with you, because you are friends of ours and will continue to be so.”

I advise Ministers to go back to the EU as fast as they can—people say there is no time, but the EU has a wonderful way of moving quickly if it needs to. The Prime Minister must say to the EU, “I have heard the voice of the House—the home of democracy. I cannot get this deal through. We need far more flexibility than you have been prepared to offer. For example, remove the backstop.” I think that then she could come back and get the agreement of the House. Then, we could get on with Brexit, which is antagonising millions of people across the country.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): How does my hon. Friend interpret what the Prime Minister said last night about reaching out to the other side of the House? If we are to take both sides of the House with us and bearing in mind that a majority of right hon. and hon. Members in this House are for remain and not for leave, does that not mean that the Prime Minister will end up with an even softer Brexit than the one she has proposed?

Richard Drax: Nothing would delight me more than if every single MP in the House said, “Let’s get behind the Prime Minister. Let’s deal with Brexit. Let’s get out of the EU while remaining a good trading partner with them. Let’s get on with our lives.” I am absolutely convinced that this country will do well and prosper and flourish as an independent country, as we were for many hundreds of years before we joined the EU. When we leave, we will flourish. Of that, I have absolutely no doubt. I inform my right hon. Friend that I had a message from the Chief Whip this morning. I asked him to confirm that the date of 29 March is still very much Government policy, and I have it here in black and white that it is.

No one wants a no-deal Brexit. I have been accused of being an extremist and of this and that. I have been accused of wanting to crash out and all this cliff-edge nonsense. I do not want to do that, but we have to have a stick to wield at the EU if we are to negotiate properly. If ultimately it cannot give us a deal, then we leave on WTO terms, which most of the world trades on peacefully and effectively. It will be bumpy—leaving the place after 44 years will be—but we will manage because we are a great country. We will survive, flourish and do well. [HON. MEMBERS: “Survive?”] Not survive. “Flourish” is the word I used. According to the doomsters, we are all doomed. I am saying that we will not be doomed; we will flourish. I say to those on the Front Bench, let us get on with it and deliver Brexit.

4.32 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), because his speech shows the level of so many Members’ detachment from the absolute reality of the complexity of the Brexit negotiations and what the Prime Minister is trying to achieve. They are divorced from the reality of the negotiations, from the consequences for the people we represent and from the conditions in which people are already living in this country. They say, “We will survive. There will still be food on the table. There will still be Mars bars and packets of crisps,” but that was not the promise made to people during the referendum. The people were promised something better. Just as the rats have deserted the sinking ship of the Cabinet, so the promises went with them. My constituents who voted leave are now being offered something far less optimistic than the rosy, pie in the sky promises made during the referendum.

The debate is not about the referendum; it is about whether we have confidence in Her Majesty’s Government. It is striking that so few Members are coming along to defend the Government and that so few have bothered to talk about the Government’s record. There was one speech during the debate on the withdrawal agreement that captured perfectly why so many people voted to leave. It was made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who said:

“I think Brexit was a great cry from the heart and soul of the British people. Too many people in this country feel that the country and the economy are not working for them, and that the affairs of our nation are organised around a London elite. They look at the bankers being paid bonuses for the banks that their taxes helped to rescue. They look at our embassies in the Gulf that are holding flat parties to sell off-plan exclusive London properties, when they worry about how they will ever get on to the housing ladder. They worry that they may be the first generation who are not

better off than their parents, and they want to see a system back that spreads wealth and opportunity.”—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 922-923.]

What the hon. Gentleman neglected to say, and what so many people who sit on the Government Benches will not acknowledge is that every single one of those problems was made in Britain.

It is this place that is responsible for the gross inequality of the country, and it is the party opposite that has prosecuted the policies that have led to half a million more children living in poverty than when we left Government nine years ago. It is the party opposite that has left 4 million working people living in poverty. It is the party opposite that has pursued punitive benefits policies resulting in people sleeping rough not just on the streets of our constituencies, but on the doorsteps and entrances to this Palace, literally dying under our feet. Despite that, it takes not a shred of responsibility and makes not a single offer of hope.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): During the remain campaign, the hon. Gentleman and I were on the same side of the debate. I am sure he remembers the Leader of the Opposition not turning up to events, not willing to contribute to the overall UK remain campaign and not playing his part to keep the UK in the EU. What will he do differently this time to get his leader to participate in this debate?

Wes Streeting: This is not the afternoon for the hon. Gentleman to lecture me about holding my leadership to account. This is an afternoon for him and every other Conservative Member to hold their rotten Government to account for the policies that are making his constituents and mine poorer. We have heard a lot about the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon. If they think he is as terrible as they have said, maybe they can explain why, the Prime Minister having confidently called a general election with the promise of a huge sweeping majority, so many Conservative Members lost their seats. I will tell them why. It is because, when it comes to tackling the chronic housing crisis, the crisis in our schools, the crisis in the NHS and the crisis that hits people in their pockets, the Leader of the Opposition is more in touch with people in this country than the Prime Minister and the Tories will ever be. That is the truth.

Mr Seely: If that is the case, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why so many on his side—173 MPs, I think—refused to back his leadership?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) has just been elevated to the Privy Council. I trust his note of appreciation to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) will be in the internal post today.

Wes Streeting: It has been a long time coming, Mr Speaker.

I say with some humility to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) that this really is not the afternoon for Conservative Members to talk about motions of no confidence. Not only did more than half their Back Benchers declare no confidence in the Prime Minister and her leadership, but this afternoon is about confidence in the Government. He should be defending the Government’s record.

[*Wes Streeting*]

This debate is not just about gross inequality and what is happening to the very poorest in our society. Nine years ago, we were told we had to tighten our belts, that things would be hard and that difficult choices would have to be made, and the majority of people believed and accepted that and voted in the way they thought best. Nine years on, it is the experience of people who use and rely on our public services that things are demonstrably worse than they were nine years ago. Our schools are less well funded than they were when Labour left office, with per pupil funding down by 8% and teachers walking out of the profession in droves.

Some 2.5 million more people are waiting longer than four hours in accident and emergency departments and the number of people waiting more than two months for cancer treatments has doubled. Furthermore—and unbelievably, from a Conservative Government—people in my constituency are describing a state of lawlessness because the Government have cut the Metropolitan police to the bone: more than £1 billion of funding cuts; the loss of 21,000 police officers, almost 7,000 police community support officers and 15,000 police staff; officer numbers at their lowest levels for 30 years; and the highest rises in crime in a decade.

It is no wonder that this afternoon Conservative Members do not want to stand up and defend the record of this Government. It is not a record they can defend. It is now right—in fact, it is past time—to acknowledge that the Government have lost control of Parliament and their ability to govern and have lost the confidence of the British people. It is time for Conservative Members to do the right thing and declare, as we will, no confidence in Her Majesty's Government.

4.38 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford North (*Wes Streeting*).

It is well documented that I have had my differences with the Prime Minister in recent weeks and months, and it was with regret that I found I could not support her deal in the Lobby last night and had to vote against it, but I can assure the House that I will be voting against this motion of no confidence this evening, because I want this Conservative Government to remain in office.

The Prime Minister has many qualities, and those qualities have come to the fore in recent times. People across the country admire her resilience, fortitude and determination, and I join them in saying that those are indeed great qualities, which she has demonstrated. Let me also say, with respect, that if she now directs those qualities towards the European Commission, her stock in this nation will rise dramatically. The people of this country want to see our Prime Minister stand up to those in the EU and tell them what it needs from the negotiations, and I encourage her to do that.

There is no doubt that the Prime Minister has been given an incredibly challenging job, but that job has been made all the harder by the behaviour of some Members who have sought to undermine her negotiating position time and again. Those who have called for a second referendum have completely undermined her position by making the EU believe that we could have a

second vote to overturn the decision, thus making the deal unattractive in the hope that we would reject it, while those who have discounted no deal have undermined her position by taking it off the table. Anyone involved in negotiations will say that no deal must remain a position in any successful negotiation.

I find it very interesting that Labour Front Benchers have said that they would rule out no deal, on the basis that it would be damaging to the country. I do not think no deal would be that damaging to the country—it would be a challenge—and businesses in my community tell me time and again that what they really fear is not a no-deal Brexit but a Labour Government. They are far more afraid of that. Let me say this to those Labour Front Benchers: if you have discounted no deal on the basis that it would be damaging to businesses, will you now please discount a Labour Government on the same criterion? Businesses up and down the country want us to stay in government to prevent Labour from taking office.

It is fair to say that we are not where we want to be in these negotiations. However, I absolutely back the Prime Minister in her position, which is to say that we will continue to seek a consensus across the House to establish a basis on which we can renegotiate with the EU and come up with a deal that we can deliver for this country. So I will back the Government tonight. We need to deliver Brexit; we need to deliver the Brexit that we promised the country in our manifesto; and then we need to move on to a domestic agenda so that we can start to deliver the changes that the country needs and is crying out for.

4.42 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (*Steve Double*), although I must admit that I share none of his convictions about either the qualities of the Prime Minister or the virtues of no deal.

I thought that something had happened last night, but the pantomime points scoring is continuing in this place. Last night, I voted against the Brexit deal, and in doing so, I voted for the Prime Minister to change course. I voted for averting the damaging consequences of her deal. It is now time to move on to a real solution to this Brexit mess. Parliament cannot come to an agreement on the way forward, so it is time for the people to decide on our European future. However, one thing stands in the way. Labour has, at long last, satisfied one element of its conference policy and it has tabled a motion of no confidence. I will of course support the motion, but if it fails to gain the support of the House tonight, the Labour party must move on and satisfy the next element of its conference motion by adopting a people's vote, as its membership demanded.

Let me be clear: as well as taking no deal off the table, we need to take no progress off the table. Plaid Cymru will reconsider its support if the Leader of the Opposition decides instead to embark on an infinitely failing, hopeless series of motions of no confidence, tabled on a rolling basis, when there is evidence that there is no hope of success and those motions have no chance of making a critical difference. All that that would achieve would be further parliamentary paralysis. I do not think that, in all honesty, anyone in this place wants to see that, and certainly no one outside wants to see it.

With all this in mind, those of us who oppose the British Government's policy need to explain how to avoid a no-deal Brexit when there is seemingly no clear majority under the normal binary voting systems that are the convention in the House of Commons. Several hon. Members have offered credible solutions to break the impasse, including my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards). He has put forward a novel idea to ensure that the House of Commons is able to reach a conclusion on a proposal. The answer could lie in the use of an alternative voting system. My party would always have a preference for a people's vote, and I believe in this method of voting and, with Labour's support, I believe it would be the most preferred option of Members of Parliament across the House of Commons.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): If the result in that referendum were again to leave, would the hon. Lady be willing to respect the result the second time and, if the result were to remain, would she be happy with those on the leave side calling for a best of three?

Liz Saville Roberts: What I am proposing here is a means for this place to find its way out of the present impasse. At present, we might be talking about indicative votes, but there may well be other ways. We find ourselves in an unprecedented situation: the procedures we have used in this place in the past appear unlikely to take us out of the impasse. I am begging this place to look at creative means to enable us to move ahead. My party will be moving ahead to propose, with part of that system that we may use, a people's vote as the way ahead. We in this place have been fairly criticised outside for not proposing ways forward. I beg all of us to seek ways forward.

I will not take any more time as I am very much aware, as a member of a small party who usually has very little time to speak, how valuable the time we have is. I conclude by saying that the House of Commons has effectively taken control of Brexit policy. It defeated—we should remember this; this is not just about a tit-for-tat on both sides—the British Government's deeply deficient deal last night. We must now find a way to ensure we can come together for a conclusive decision in favour of a people's vote.

4.47 pm

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I rise to support the Government and to speak against this motion. In doing that, I will talk about the record of this Government and the issue that has triggered today's vote: yesterday's Brexit vote.

To put our record in context, everything the Conservatives have done in government since 2010 has had to be framed in the context of the recession, the massive deficit and mess left behind by the Labour party. Despite the mess left behind—the 6% drop in GDP, the 800,000 more people unemployed—under this Conservative party, 3.4 million jobs have been created, we have record employment and record unemployment, we have provided 15 hours of free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds and 30 hours of free childcare for working parents, and the national living wage. We have cut income tax so that people can now earn double nearly what they could under the Labour party before paying income tax. We

have not increased fuel duty for eight years and many more of our children are coming out of primary school with a far higher standard of reading and writing than previously. We have more doctors and nurses in our hospitals. We have fewer infections and people dying because of those in our hospitals, and we are putting £20 billion into the NHS and have a 10-year plan for the NHS, under which we are putting significantly more money into mental health provision. In my constituency, the Labour party tried to close A&E and maternity, so Labour does not have the record it states or thinks it has.

Have we got everything right? No, we have not got everything right in government. There is still a lot more to do. We need to make sure we build on the money and extra resources that we are now putting into the police force. We need to make sure we honour the commitment to halve and end rough sleeping. We need to make sure we keep refining universal credit to get it right, because having a system that gets people into work is the right thing to do. The alternative is more debt, more borrowing and a leadership team that does not believe in this country and thinks more about other countries than its own.

We are here because of the Brexit debate, and Opposition Members have talked about nothing but red lines today. Whether we like what the Prime Minister put on the table yesterday or not, the red lines that she put down were based solely on the referendum in which the British public voted and on manifestos that about 85% of the public voted for. Despite problems across the House and people driving their own agendas, she has tried her best to get a deal that the House can agree with. Clearly, it does not do so, but I say to Opposition Members that this House voted to have a referendum and the public voted for Brexit. We must deliver on that.

People do not want a general election. They want us to get on with the job and come out of the European Union, and they want us to come together as a House to do that in a sensible way. They do not want a general election, as they do not believe that the Leader of the Opposition is a Prime Minister in waiting. They do not believe that he could be a Prime Minister. I am against this motion and I will be proud to go through the Lobby and vote to back this Government tonight.

4.51 pm

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): If ever there were an advert for why we need a general election and why we have no confidence in this Government, it has been the speeches from Conservative Members today. They are so divorced from reality. Watching this crisis unfold, I have often been struck by how this process is being viewed by the people we represent. People in North West Durham and beyond voted to leave or to remain for a number of reasons. They had feelings of being left behind by the establishment and of seeing their security dwindling and their communities being abandoned. They were worried that their rights were going to be eroded and that their businesses might close. Some wanted to take back control; some wanted to be part of something bigger. Those are all complex, individual reasons, but very few of my constituents have been satisfied by the way in which this Government have represented them in the negotiations with the EU. Instead, we are tangled up in the tensions between

[*Laura Pidcock*]

two factions of the Conservative party—the hard right and the centre right—and in the arbitrary red lines of the Government. We are in a shameful state, but it goes further than that.

The Government cannot now govern, and not just on our withdrawal from the EU. That is not a slogan; it genuinely reflects the position that we are in. Where are we at, as a country? In the north-east and in North West Durham—in fact, in all our communities—people are suffering. Their pay does not cover their bills, and the shambolic universal credit system makes them poorer, stigmatised and stressed. After eight years of austerity, this country is on its knees. An increasing number of people are homeless, many are destitute and some—as has been mentioned in a number of fantastic contributions—are even dying as a result of the system.

Do teachers in this country have confidence in this Government? Do nurses, doctors, firefighters, prison officers, those in private businesses waiting for a deal, those waiting for brown envelopes from the DWP to tell them whether they have been sanctioned, those deemed fit for work while ill, those who are homeless, or the 1950s women have confidence in this Government? I think not. The reality is out there and, you know what, I hope it pricks the conscience of the 100-plus Conservative MPs who decided that the Prime Minister was not fit to lead them just a few weeks ago, and of the similar number who agreed with us that the Brexit deal was a farce. Will they now stand up for all those people who are suffering?

The speeches from Conservative Members have been desperate; they are desperate to denigrate the Labour party because they are scared by the powerful arguments of the Leader of the Opposition. When those Members go through the Lobby tonight to say that they have confidence in this Government, they will be voting for more chaos and more austerity. They might as well be stepping over all those children going to school without food in their belly, stepping over the pensioners without the ability to heat their home and stepping over the homeless people on our streets. This will mean that they could not care less about those people. This country, our communities and working people deserve so much better. We deserve a different direction, and fast. We need a general election to get this lot out now.

4.54 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): In moving this motion of no confidence earlier today, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that it was about delivering Brexit—but this Parliament, elected in 2017, was elected to perform that task. Both main parties, Labour and Conservative alike, stood on a manifesto of respecting the referendum result, and between the two of us we got 82% of the vote. It is our responsibility now, together, each and every one of us, to find a way of making Brexit work for our country. Claiming that the only way to do that is by holding yet another general election is an abdication of the individual responsibility that each and every one of us took upon our shoulders by standing as candidates in the 2017 general election.

But the particular mendacity of the Leader of the Opposition in moving this motion and claiming that he would be given a mandate if he won a general election is

that he has absolutely no policy on Brexit at all. Given that he has no policy, he could not possibly have any mandate to do anything, were he to win a general election in the first place. He goes about the north of the country saying that he is in favour of Brexit. He gives remain-leaning constituencies in London and the south the impression that he is in favour of remaining. In a general election campaign, he would collapse under the weight of his own contradictions. He was asked time and again, last night and over the weekend, and by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) earlier, to articulate his policy on Brexit, and he could not do so. He could not do so because he has no policy. It is up to all of us to pull together and work out a way of delivering Brexit sensibly.

Mr Seely: I think the Leader of the Opposition has 13 policies on Brexit, not none.

Chris Philp: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clarifying the multiplicity of policies that the Leader of the Opposition adopts at different times when he finds it convenient to do so.

I would say to the Government, though, that they should listen after the vote last night. Clearly, the margin of defeat was not a small one. If one thing needs to be changed to give this proposal a chance of passing, it is obviously the backstop. My advice to the Government is that we need to speak to the European Union about introducing legally binding changes to the backstop to render the withdrawal agreement acceptable to this House. I ask the Government to speak to the European Union on that topic in the coming days.

We have also heard a great deal from Labour Members about the Government's record more generally—particularly from the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for North West Durham (Laura Pidcock). I am proud to defend this Government's record over the last nine years. I heard education mentioned. It was of course my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who I see in his place, who, as Education Secretary, introduced reforms that mean that now more children than ever before are attending good and outstanding schools. That is not my judgment or the Government's judgment—it is the judgment of Ofsted. It is the quality of the education that our children receive that really matters.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Chris Philp: I will give way again in a moment.

I heard the NHS mentioned as well—of course, a vital institution that we all cherish. Contrary to the dire warnings issued at various general elections about how the NHS is unsafe in Conservative hands, we heard announced just a few weeks ago the biggest ever increase in funding for the NHS—£23 billion a year in real terms. We are seeing that in Croydon already, with a brand new accident and emergency department just opened at Croydon University Hospital. I visited it only last Friday; it is twice the size of the old one. It is a fantastic facility funded by the Department of Health and by this Government.

With regard to poverty and inequality, Labour Members will be aware that absolute poverty has gone down and that income inequality has never been lower. They will

be aware that the way we combat poverty is by creating employment, and employment is at a record level as well. I am proud that it is a Conservative Government who have, since 2010, increased the minimum wage by 38%—significantly higher than the rate of inflation. That goes to show that this Government are on the side of working people on low incomes. I will be proud to support them in the Division Lobby this evening.

4.59 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow what I will say was a textbook speech from the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). I agreed with a great deal of what the Leader of the Opposition said in his opening speech and certainly with many of the passionate contributions from my hon. Friends. The past eight years of Conservative or Conservative-led Government have put great strain on our communities. The very fabric that holds our public services and the voluntary sector together has been stretched, because of wrong decisions made by Governments over recent years, which have had an intolerable impact on many people's lives. We have to get justice for the WASPI women; we must put schools and hospitals on a better footing; and, my goodness, we have to sort out our train system, because what is happening in my constituency has been at the worst end of what Northern rail has been inflicting on passengers.

We are now in a dire situation following yesterday's monumental defeat, and this country is facing a national emergency. However, what makes this an almost uniquely serious situation is that this motion of no confidence cannot be taken in a vacuum, because it would lead to a general election that would give the public a choice between a Government that are struggling to govern and a Leader of the Opposition and shadow Chancellor who—I have not changed my view—are simply not fit to hold high office. The public deserve so much better than this choice in this broken political system. They deserve leadership that will right the terrible injustices that have been inflicted on our communities and take them out of this Brexit mess, and they deserve a Government that they can trust to keep them secure.

Aside from the Leader of the Opposition's past positions, of which there has been much discussion today, let me focus on the nuclear deterrent, which is central to my constituency. I have spent many years as an Opposition MP working with my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and the shadow Defence Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), to keep the Labour party's policy sensible on the face of it. However, do my colleagues really think that, with the spending crisis that any future Labour Government will inherit, we would spend many billions of pounds to maintain a submarine system that the Leader of the Opposition will have rendered useless on day one by saying that he would never use it? That is not a serious proposition.

With a heavy heart, I must tell the House that I cannot support the no-confidence motion tonight—*[Interruption.]* Some of my hon. Friends mutter, "Disgrace," and I hear others tutting, but many of them are probably privately saying, "Thank God that you have the freedom not to support the motion," because they are wrestling with their consciences. They desperately want a Labour Government, but they know that their

party's leader is as unfit to lead the country as he was when they voted against him in the no-confidence motion three years ago.

Mr Marcus Jones: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's dilemma. What would be the effect on his area if we were to abandon the nuclear programme that this country has pursued for decades?

John Woodcock: Barrow-in-Furness is a shipyard town, and the programme is woven into our history. More than 9,000 people in my constituency are directly employed by it, and many more depend upon it. The Leader of the Opposition represents a chance that they cannot afford to take. The Prime Minister must reach out more than she has done in the Chamber today. She must unshackle herself from the hard-line Brexiteers who have led her down the wrong path.

I will commit to trying every day to give my constituents the chance of better leadership for this country. While we are in this impasse, I will do my best to deliver for them. I have been pleased to work with the Government to unlock the marina project, which is vital to the future of the local economy, and on the submarine programme, which is bringing great prosperity to the area. Much more is needed, but I will carry on with that work.

5.4 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is an enormous honour to follow a speech as brave as the one by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). I have mentally ripped up what I was going to say and will, I hope, say something in response. I have enormous respect for him and always have done.

Members on both sides of the House, as a whole, work extremely hard to represent their constituencies as they see fit. Since I got here, I have been very impressed by the hard work and dedication of Labour Members. I have enjoyed the cross-party working in which I have been involved, particularly in the justice sphere, where the Select Committee on Justice has made real change to people's lives, and on early pregnancy loss and baby loss. We have worked across parties to make a real difference, and I hope my remarks will be taken in that context.

I am not going to speak up for the deal, and I am not going to speak up for the Prime Minister, though I do strongly support both; unusually for me, I will talk about personalities, as the hon. Gentleman did.

The Leader of the Opposition has been an anti-war and anti-nuclear campaigner all his life, as far as I know. He would prefer to live in a republic. He supports Hamas, the IRA and various other unfashionable organisations around the world. He has voted against his Whip more often than any other Labour Member. He has been monitored by MI5 for 30 years and by special branch for 20 years because they are worried that he will undermine parliamentary democracy. He describes Karl Marx as "a great economist." The Prime Minister, who is never one to attack someone personally, mentioned his remarks following the Skripal attack.

What we need to focus on is the Leader of the Opposition's position on Europe. He opposed joining the European Community in 1975. He opposed Maastricht and Lisbon. He wants to be free of EU rules on state aid and industry.

[Victoria Prentis]

The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who supports the Leader of the Opposition in this place, is the chap who threw the little red book on the Table during my first Budget as an MP. He is the gentleman who thinks my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) should be lynched, and he wanted to assassinate Mrs Thatcher. He says that he would back a second referendum only if the option to remain were not present.

This is not acceptable. We need clarity from the Opposition at this important point for the nation. We need to know what their policy is. I was a civil servant and I find it very easy to work across parties, but, like the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, not with a party with this leadership. I joined the civil service in 1997, and one of the reasons I became a Conservative MP is that I saw that the quality of decision making improved in 2010 under the coalition Government, but that does not mean there is not good on the Opposition Benches, and we need to harness it. However, in agreement with the hon. Gentleman, I do not think anybody can have confidence in the current Labour leadership.

For those reasons alone, and for all the many good reasons mentioned by my right hon. and hon. Friends, I have complete confidence in this Government.

5.8 pm

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): As we appear to be in a political twilight zone, I feel the need to say a few home truths. I have never had confidence in this Government. Whether on Brexit, social security, immigration or pensions, I have no confidence in them, and I cannot believe anyone does.

I have no confidence in the Prime Minister, because she knew what the outcome of the vote on her deal would be, so much so that she delayed the vote, and then she came back and acted like it was a surprise that her deal failed. All that happened is she wasted a month, and she did so in the full knowledge that time is running out.

Regrettably, I have to say the same about the Leader of the Opposition, and I do say this sincerely. I cannot get my head around how the right hon. Gentleman has delayed calling for a vote of no confidence. He delayed it in the initial farce, and he failed to support the motion of no confidence from the Scottish National party and other parties. I find myself left asking the same question: what good did it do? All that happened is that this lot have had another month in power. I find myself questioning his logic of, "I am waiting for the perfect moment, the opportune moment." I think we will find at the end of this debate that that moment has passed.

I sincerely hope that the Leader of the Opposition will eventually come clean about whether he thinks this should be taken back to the people or not, because this deadlock evasiveness cannot last—it cannot continue. People deserve better. To be honest, we all deserve a better Opposition. The only thing I have any confidence in is the people of Scotland: the wealth of talent, intellect and compassion that we have to offer the world. I have no doubt that people in Scotland will be watching this entire farce back home and reaching the conclusion that the only thing they can have confidence in is the ability of our country to look after ourselves a

damn sight better than this place ever has. If the Government and the Prime Minister truly mean that she wants to reach out and have cross-party support, a good start would be listening to the will of the second largest nation in this United Kingdom and giving us the respect that we are due.

5.11 pm

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black); it is great to see her in her place. Mr Speaker, you were absolutely right earlier to point out the exuberance on these Benches during the speech made by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). I am sure you will understand the passion and frustration we sometimes feel when we hear SNP Members talking about "the voice of Scotland" and "Scottish voices". I am proud to be part of a 1,200% increase in Scottish seats represented on the Government Benches.

Let Members be in no doubt that I shall be voting tonight to support the Prime Minister and her Government, and I welcome the opportunity to do so. It is clear that a third general election in the space of less than four years would not be in the national interest, especially at such a crucial time for the future of our country. The truth is that an election would not solve anything; it would not give us certainty; it would not change the EU and its negotiating positions; and it would not change the choices before us. It would only be a recipe for delay and division. People across the country can see what is going on here: politicians on the Opposition Benches opposite are seeking to exploit the issues of historic importance currently facing this country, for party political advantage. They will have none of it; I will have none of it; and this House should have none of it.

When I vote tonight, I will be voting as a Unionist, to support a Government who have been resolutely committed to protecting our precious Union. This Prime Minister and this Government have stood up for the interests of the majority of Scots, who voted to keep the United Kingdom together in 2014 and who still do not want another independence referendum. By the way, a majority of Scots—a similar percentage, of about 56%—voted for parties committed to Brexit in the 2017 general election. Over the past 19 months, this Government have consistently stood up to the grandstanding and grievance-mongering of the SNP, which does not speak for the whole of Scotland, as it would have us believe. Throughout this process, the Prime Minister has also worked tirelessly to ensure that Northern Ireland remains a stable part of the United Kingdom. I was glad to hear the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) express his support for the Government on this motion.

The contrast between the heartfelt and committed Unionism of this Government and the hopeless pandering of the Labour party could not be clearer. We all know about the Leader of the Opposition's thoughts on Northern Ireland, but Scottish Unionists are increasingly coming to recognise that they can no longer trust Labour to stand up for Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. As recently as September, the Leader of the Opposition equivocated on the possibility of doing a deal with the SNP and allowing Nicola Sturgeon to impose Indyref 2 on the Scottish people. I remind my English, Welsh and

Northern Irish colleagues that this is not a specifically Scottish issue; it is all the United Kingdom that the SNP wishes to break apart.

Time and again, here and in Holyrood, Scottish Labour has sided with the SNP's attempts to use Brexit to undermine the Union. Only this Government—a Conservative Government led by this Prime Minister—have a track record to be trusted on protecting our Union. That, foremost in my mind among eight and a half years of Conservative achievements in government, is why I shall support the Government tonight.

Mr Speaker: Just before I call the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), I should announce that she is the last speaker to be subject to the four-minute limit. As I am seeking to accommodate as many colleagues as I can, a three-minute limit will then have to be introduced, so the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) will be subject to a three-minute limit. I call Ann Clwyd.

5.15 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am going to read a letter from a constituent—a real person—that I received this morning by email:

“Dear Ann Clwyd MP

I am your constituent and I am deeply concerned at what Brexit uncertainty is already doing to our country. No form of Brexit commands a majority among politicians. There is only one sensible road left to pursue, and that is to take the decision back to the voters and let us decide.

Parliament is deadlocked. The government's version of Brexit has failed and been rejected by Parliament. Two years of uncertainty, divisive argument and no clear solutions to the country's biggest problems has got us nowhere.

Best for Britain's new research, carried out in partnership with HOPE not hate, proves 60% of people now want the final say on Brexit. Every region now supports letting the people decide. I have included the regional results below.

I would appreciate it if you could reply to this message to tell me: Do you support giving the people the final say on the Brexit deal, with the option to stay in the EU?

Please understand the strength of my feeling on this issue. There is no majority in Parliament for any form of Brexit. While Parliament is in deadlock, the country is uniting around a referendum to resolve it. Please give us the final say.”

My constituent then lists the proportion in support of a public vote on Brexit by region and country:

“East of England, 56.00%

East Midlands, 56.80%

London, 67.60%

North East, 59.80%

North West, 61.20%

South East, 57.80%

South West, 55.10%

West Midlands, 57.90%

Yorkshire and Humber, 58.90%

Scotland, 67.70%

Wales, 60.30%”.

He finishes with:

“Yours sincerely,

David Matthews

Cilfynydd, Wales”.

My answer to him is: I support a referendum and I want to stay in the European Union.

Mr Speaker: A three-minute limit is now to apply.

5.18 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): This House can have confidence in the Government because they have taken the country from the brink of bankruptcy to the point where we have a successful and growing economy that is creating prosperity and better opportunities for people in every part of the country. They recognise the hopes and aspirations of hard-working people—people who work hard and want their children to have better chances than they had.

The Government are giving children the best possible start in life, by doubling free childcare for three and four-year-olds. Next year, there will be more record spending on early years education. The reforms—originally made in the face of hostile opposition—by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), when he was Secretary of State for Education, are now delivering improved standards in schools. From a record low of 19th in international comparators for reading under the Labour Government, we have risen to eighth under this one. I know that the Opposition do not like the figures for the number of children in good and outstanding schools, but the fact remains that in 2010, under the Labour Government, 66% of children were taught in good or outstanding schools, and that has now risen to 87%—

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): There are more children!

Mike Wood: Yes, that is 87% of a bigger number—of course it is. It is even better. And that is despite the well-recorded increase in the difficulty of inspections.

Tracy Brabin: I thank the hon. Gentleman so much for giving way. I do appreciate it. I know that we are short of time. Does he agree that there are more children in good and outstanding schools because there are more children? Do his figures include the poorest children?

Mike Wood: I hesitate to explain basic mathematics. A rise from 66% to 87% of a bigger number is even more of an increase.

When people are looking for work, they are more likely to get a job. There have been, on average, 1,000 new jobs every day since the Government came to power in 2010. Four fifths of them are full time. Most jobs are more likely to be paid more, thanks to the introduction of the national living wage and increases in the national minimum wage. At the end of all that, people are allowed to keep more of the money that they have worked so very hard to earn. While Labour doubled the starting tax rate for the lowest paid workers, the Government have taken 5 million low-paid workers out of paying income tax altogether.

Let us turn now to people who are looking for their first home. House building had collapsed ahead of 2010 as a result of the recession, but rates of house building are higher now than in 29 of the past 30 years. The Government recognise people's aspirations to own their own home, but they also recognise the need for good social and private rented housing as well. While the Opposition are dogmatically opposed to letting people buy the houses in which they live, the Government are supporting first-time buyers and lifting the cap on housing revenue account borrowing to allow for more council-built social housing.

[Mike Wood]

At every stage in life, spending on the NHS will be £20 billion higher at the end of this five-year period than at the start. That is on top of the 15,000 extra doctors and the nearly 13,000 more nurses in our hospitals compared with 2010. Hard-working families deserve better than the paleo-Marxist Citizen Smith tribute act that is offered by the Opposition Front Bench team—

Mr Howarth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is the term “pillock” considered unparliamentary?

Mr Speaker: I do not think that that word was used. I think the word was “paleo”. It is rather unfair that the point of order came when it did, and the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) should certainly have 10 seconds to finish his speech.

Mike Wood: Economic security, greater opportunity, sustainable investment in our public services and many other reasons are why Dudley South and this House can have confidence in Her Majesty's Government this evening.

5.22 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to say that I have no confidence in Her Majesty's Government. In doing so, I will not address the domestic record of the Government—I wish that I had time to do so as it has been one of hunger and homelessness, and that is a record that needs revealing, but in three minutes that is clearly not possible.

The Government genuinely deserve to lose this vote today because there is only one reason for their existence, and only one reason why the Prime Minister is the Prime Minister, and that is Brexit. The job of this Government was to deliver Brexit. After the referendum, the majority of MPs accepted the result and wanted to work pragmatically on a deal to secure the best terms of our new relationship. We did not do so lightly. Let us not forget that the referendum was called only to try to solve some internal problems in the Conservative party. David Cameron had expected that there would be another hung Parliament and that the Liberal Democrats would be in coalition with him again and that he could drop the idea entirely, and he got it wrong.

As a result, we all got the most divisive politics that this country has had in the modern era. The denigration of expertise and reason became the new normal. All of us saw our friend murdered in that campaign, and yet, despite that, there was no doubt that this House had, and still does have, a cross-party majority for a Brexit deal. But how did the Prime Minister respond to that? Did she reach out across party lines? No. Did she seek to unite leavers and remainers? No. Did she provide leadership on the big questions? Absolutely not. Instead, we had this played from the beginning for narrow party advantage. Reasonable concerns about how customs would work, how the banking system would function, the rights of EU citizens and even which queue at passport control EU citizens would use were first dismissed and then, cynically and falsely, presented as opposition to Brexit itself. When an election was called, despite the Prime Minister giving her word, Downing Street briefed it as a chance to “Crush the saboteurs”. Well, how

ironic that the deal's biggest saboteur has turned out to be the Prime Minister herself, and it is her deal that has been crushed.

We all appreciate that the Conservative party is irrevocably split on this issue, and its decision on the final destination risks losing one half of its Members entirely. But the answer to that is to reach out and have a conversation with all of the House of Commons. Instead of that, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) was appointed Foreign Secretary and travelled around Europe insulting our friends. Then there was the nationalistic rhetoric of the “citizens of nowhere” speech and the idea at Conservative conference that we could list foreign workers, as if we were living in 1930s Germany. Then we had the Chancellor threatening our friends and allies with economic warfare as if the UK were some overgrown school bully. All this has squandered centuries of good will and landed us where we are.

It is this Prime Minister, this Government, these red lines and this strategy that are to blame for bringing this country to the abyss. The Government have nothing left to offer; and, in the national interest, they should go.

5.25 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Well, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), although I could not disagree more with his characterisation of the situation.

I remember a Labour Prime Minister who promised this country a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, and virtually his last act in government was to sign it and renege on that promise to the British people. I feel that the resentment, after years of broken Labour promises in relation to referendums, bears a large part of the blame in the outcome of the referendum vote. That is not to mention the absolutely miserable way in which the Leader of the Opposition failed to campaign or make a proper case for remaining in the EU during the referendum debate. I will therefore take no lectures from the Labour party.

The hon. Gentleman talked about reaching out, but there is no explanation as to how the Labour policy would get over the line in terms of state aid because the Opposition say that they want a customs union, but they do not want to accept rules on state aid. They also say that they can negotiate a better deal, but do not want to accept the rules on free movement. The reality of the Labour party's position is that it would fail its own six tests.

I am a Member of this House who has shown a willingness to work across parties to get a decent and sensible Brexit result, despite the fact that I personally believe that the best deal that we have is remaining in the EU. I made a promise to try to implement the referendum result, but I do not see that there have been any constructive proposals from Opposition Front Benchers.

The reason that I have confidence in the Government—and I do—is that, although the press has been taken over with Brexit, we have been getting on with the job and delivering in so many other ways. Some 39,000 workers in my constituency have been taken out of tax because of the Government's proposals. I remember Gordon Brown introducing a 10p tax rate on those earning just over £4,500; the lowest paid had to pay tax. Now, a

low-paid worker in my constituency will not pay tax until they are earning at least £12,500. That is one of many achievements by the Government.

We have introduced a new benefit of two weeks' paid parental leave, which is one of the first new benefits that we have introduced for many years and is a significant achievement. There are also very good environmental policies coming out of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There is a good record of which to be proud.

5.28 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach).

The unsettled mood that we feel in the Chamber today and across the whole of Parliament is reflected across the whole of our society. Out there in the communities, there is a feeling and a desire for change—for something else. This feeling and desire for change manifests itself in different ways, but we would be wrong to ignore it and to underestimate its significance. It manifests itself in the anger that is felt in our communities, including the increased hate that all of us across the House are receiving. It manifests itself in the despair at, and dissociation from, democracy and the lack of faith in anybody in Parliament.

This is a pivotal moment, and it is about more than whether we think we should have a Labour Government or a Conservative Government, although of course the answer is Labour. It is about how we give back trust and faith to ordinary people. This feeling and mood for change is not going to go away. People are exhausted—they are exhausted by austerity. I do not think anybody in this House appreciates quite how draining poverty is and how the daily grind can get you down.

Even if Members ignore every other word I say, I would like them to reflect on this statistic: across Yorkshire, there has been a 30% increase in the number of suicides. As I have mentioned before, my constituency covers the Humber bridge, which has become a hotspot for suicides. People are driving there from around the country to take their own lives. What greater damning indictment of this Government can there be that they have left people in such a state of despair, feeling that they have no future whatever?

What answers are people being offered? Nothing. We have more arguments and Members tearing into each other on the Government Benches, while the people in our communities continue to suffer. They suffer when they go to the NHS. In terms of the nonsense spouted at us about all the good and outstanding schools, I suggest, with respect, that the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) check the last time that those schools were inspected, which might give him a more accurate figure. Crime is increasing, and people feel unsafe in their homes. The antisocial behaviour that so many people here probably ignore because the gates to their properties allow them to cannot be ignored by the people in our communities.

This is a moment when we can really make a difference. It is in our gift to give people the change they need. We can channel that need for change into a positive vision for hope, but only if we vote down this Government and have a Labour Government, who will truly deliver for everybody in our country.

5.31 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Even though I respect the comments made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), I am concerned that she sees everything in a very different light from me. I am much more optimistic about our future.

The motion before us may seem simplistic, yet it raises questions that go much further. We are in the midst of a battle for the heart and soul of our country and all the things we hold dear. The decisions we take in this place today and over the coming weeks will irreversibly change the course of our history. They will shape Britain's standing in the world for a generation and, in the process, will perhaps determine the future of this Parliament—the mother of all Parliaments, which has served our nation through war and peace for the best part of 1,000 years.

On the central question of Europe, which has led us to this position, I make the following points. Like the long-time Brexiteers, I am fully committed to ensuring that the UK can end its membership of the European Union at 11 pm on 29 March, as set down in law. Nothing less than an agreement that ends the free movement of people and returns full control over our money and laws is acceptable to me and the majority of the people of Erewash who voted to leave in the referendum in June 2016. My message for the remainers is that I voted to remain in the European Union, but we lost that argument, and consequently the UK will be leaving the EU.

Europe may have brought us to this point, but that does not detract from the fact that the single biggest threat to the safety, security and prosperity of our country is sitting on the Opposition Benches. The choice before us today is clear: do we want a socialist Government who, within hours of being returned to office, would cause a “run on the pound”, in the words of the shadow Chancellor; a socialist Government who would drive investment out of Britain through their ideological pursuit of nationalisation; a socialist Government whose own Back Benchers advocate the confiscation of council houses bought under the right-to-buy scheme; and a socialist Government who would make my constituents poorer in every sense of the word? I cannot let that happen to my constituents in Erewash or countenance such outcomes. The Government have my full support and confidence today and in the future.

5.34 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Margaret Thatcher famously quoted Attlee in saying that referendums were the instruments of “demagogues and dictators” because Hitler used them to adopt supreme power and, basically, invade other countries after rearming. My reason for having no confidence in the Prime Minister is not simply because she has doubled the debt and created poverty and social injustice, but because she thinks the advisory referendum is an unconditional mandate to Brexit at any cost, in any circumstances, without consulting the people on whether this represents their reasonable expectations.

The people were offered more money and more trade, and control over their laws and over migration, but in fact they have not got any of those things. We will have to pay £39 billion. There will be a squeezing of the

[Geraint Davies]

economy, fewer jobs and less trade. We will not be with team EU when negotiating with big players such as China. Northern Ireland will be an open border for immigration via Dublin. We will not control our immigration, and if we did, we would in any case just switch from a cultural neighbour to more distant immigration.

There is no evidence that the people of Britain support the deal. It is a betrayal of conservatism because it moves us away from our most established market in the world and breaks up the Union. It is a betrayal of socialism because we will have a smaller cake to divide more equally. It is bad for our economy, our security, our environment and our common values.

It is my view that I have no confidence in the Prime Minister because she has no confidence in the people to make a judgment on the deal she has delivered. If they want it, let us go ahead. If we do not have that vote, we will just wait another two years in the transition period, when we could in fact have a vote on this, decide on reflection it is better for us all to remain and have two years sorting out this country, rather than having this situation where we just talk about Brexit and Britain is burning around us.

Yes, there will be some anger if we have a people's vote, but I put it to the House that there will be absolute rage if we do not and Brexit goes forward. People voted to leave; they did not vote to leave their jobs. Brexit is now being seen warts and all, and we are also seeing that Europe is a much more virtuous place than before. It was a massive defeat last night. Yes, the Prime Minister needs to look cross-party at all the options. If we cannot agree any deal, let us put the deal we have to the people, and they can decide whether to continue.

In the meantime, I am calling for a general election, but if we do not get a general election, we should have a people's vote. The Labour party should stand up for remain, and when we win that, there should be an election because we will have had a Government who were elected on a strong and stable Brexit but are weak and unstable. We will then deliver a Labour Government and a better Britain.

5.37 pm

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am obviously not terribly delighted that we are having a vote of confidence in the Conservative Government, but I suppose I might thank the Opposition for bringing my party back together today. We were heavily divided last night, but I can be confident that we are all going to go through the same Lobby together. It will be a bonding experience, so thank you very much for doing that for us.

It is of course quite right that we are having a vote of no confidence. We find ourselves in a peculiar hung Parliament in which, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the Government suffered a major defeat last night and have suffered a defeat on a money Bill. It is quite right that the confidence of the House is tested. However, we are all quite aware of what will happen. The Government are going to win this vote this evening, and then we are going to have to move on. The most interesting question is not about this vote, which is a foregone conclusion. It is about what is going to happen after that.

We know what the Prime Minister is going to do. She has offered to reach out, speak to other corners of the Commons and look for some consensus, but we still do not know what the Opposition are asking for. The fact that we have been put on the spot in a vote of no confidence, when the Opposition have not said what they would take to the public in the event of a general election is, quite frankly, shameful. That reminds me of how, in 1997, the Labour party managed to breeze into power without telling the public—[*Interruption.*] Yes, it won by a convincing majority, but it did not tell the public in advance what its policy was on the single European currency. That had to be wrung out of Labour when it was already in power. The Labour party has a track record on this. If it wants to go to the country, it at least should have the courtesy to tell the public what it would take into that vote.

Helen Jones: Record spending in the NHS.

Alex Burghart: Record debt is what we would have. The hon. Lady's party is offering this country and my voters—my tax-paying constituents—£1,000 billion of extra debt. That is £35,000 extra for everyone who lives in this country.

Helen Jones *rose*—

Alex Burghart: I am very happy to give way and take the extra time.

Helen Jones: The hon. Gentleman, perhaps because he is rather younger than me, seems to have forgotten that, when the Labour party took office, NHS waiting lists were 18 months for some specialties. Under the Labour Government, there were practically no waiting lists in some specialties. We are all proud of that record.

Alex Burghart: And when the hon. Lady's party left power, we had record debt, a crashed economy and a loss of confidence in our foreign policy after the disastrous Iraq war. The Labour party ran this country into the ground. Eight years later, we have record employment; we have rising wages—we have everything a sensible, evenly minded, well-balanced economy has brought. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a very unseemly atmosphere, but the hon. Gentleman is at least still smiling, and that is to be welcomed. [*Interruption.*] Order. Let us hear the hon. Gentleman.

Alex Burghart: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The truth is that the Labour party left power under an enormous cloud. Everybody knows it. It left after a disastrous 13 years in office, in which the economy was destroyed, and Government Members are united in our desire to ensure that it does not have an opportunity to do that again. Let us be frank: the Blair-Brown years were a golden age compared with what would come after a general election this year, should the Labour party force one upon us. We would rather have Blair and Brown than Corbyn and McDonnell any day of the week, but those options are not available to the British public.

5.42 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for tabling this motion of no confidence, which I will support in the Lobby this evening.

I came into politics challenged with trying to make a difference to the lives of the ordinary people of Bradford West—trying to be part of a system that is about putting people first, not about people clinging to power and positions, with self-preservation at the heart of everything they do. I have lived experience of destitution and poverty. A generation later, constituents come to my surgery in sheer destitution, crying because they do not know how they are going to feed their children or meet their basic needs, and the reality of insecure jobs and in-work poverty leads people with dependants further into destitution. We must ask whether this Government are fit for purpose.

I have spent a short time in the House. Although the final nail in the coffin was yesterday's catastrophic defeat—the largest defeat of any Government in the history of our democracy—the real tragedy for me and my constituents is that this Government have not been fit for purpose for a very long time. This Government were not fit for purpose when the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights described the level of child poverty in the UK as

“not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster” in the fifth largest economy in the world. This Government were not fit for purpose when they pursued a policy of rolling out a hostile environment, which led to the tragedies of the Windrush scandal. This Government were not fit for purpose when they were found in contempt of Parliament.

This Government are not fit for purpose when they are repeatedly defeated in the courts by single parents and people with disabilities and forced to go back to the drawing board on their own policies. This Government were not fit for purpose when they failed again last year to stop the increase in homelessness on the streets of Britain, and even failed to save the life of the poor man who died outside the doors of Parliament just weeks ago. This Government were not fit for purpose when Conservative Members decided to use food banks for photo ops. This Government are not fit for purpose when films such as “I, Daniel Blake” are no longer a fiction but many people's reality.

This Government have consistently acted in the interests of the few, not the many, offering tax giveaways to the rich while viciously cutting services for the most vulnerable in this country. The Government were not fit for purpose when the Prime Minister knew her deal was dead before the recess but chose to sabotage and hold Parliament hostage by delaying the vote. The list goes on. How can those 117 Conservative colleagues who voted that this Prime Minister was not fit to lead their party go back to the electorate and say that she is fit to lead the country?

5.45 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

I would argue that, when Members consider their position on the confidence motion tonight, their assessment should be based not on just one vote—however fundamental that issue is for the nation's future—but on this Government's record in office. Three practical measures of a Government's relative success are taxation levels for working families, employment levels and investment in public services. It must be remembered that it is this Government who have cut taxes for

32 million working people, so that they keep more of the money they earn. It is this Government who have seen unemployment not just decline but plummet to a record low. It is this Government who are investing more than £20 billion in the NHS for our future health—and through Barnett consequential that will benefit NHS Scotland immensely. In the same period, all Opposition Front Benchers have achieved is an ever-changing conviction and little consensus on every issue. In fact, the only point of consensus appears to be that the Government have got it wrong on every issue. That is clearly not the case, and the facts do not support the Opposition's somewhat gloomy assessment.

This Government are pressing ahead with ongoing investment in research and development, with growth deals throughout the country, such as the one emerging in Ayrshire. They recognise the importance of the environment and have produced the 25-year environment plan—something never done before in the United Kingdom. They have secured a stable economy after a very weak inheritance, and they listen when changes are needed—for example, to universal credit. They are not a Government in crisis, as the Opposition allege to secure an election. They are a Government who are getting on with the business of governing.

The Prime Minister has worked incredibly hard on those and other issues over the past two years, and I earnestly encourage hon. Members to support the Government tonight. With everything else that is going on and the Conservatives being the only party with a clear desire to honour the referendum, this is not the time to hold an unnecessary and unwanted general election. It is time to get on with what we have been asked to do, before our constituents lose faith in every parliamentarian in this House. I have every confidence in Her Majesty's Conservative and Unionist Government, and I will be voting for them tonight.

5.47 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Last night's defeat was an extraordinary humiliation for the Prime Minister. If ever there were a situation to be described as chickens coming home to roost, it was that, for it is a national calamity of the Prime Minister's own making. It was the Prime Minister who failed to reach out across the House to find consensus on a way forward from the narrow win for leave in the 2016 referendum. It was the Prime Minister who painted herself into a corner with a series of bright red lines, designed only to appease the most extreme Brexiteers in her party. It was the Prime Minister who triggered article 50 far too prematurely. Crucially, it was also the Prime Minister who resolutely failed to tackle any of the underlying injustices that drove the 2016 referendum result.

Many people voted leave because they believed that the status quo in this country is intolerable, and they are right—it is. We are a country of grotesque inequalities, not just between classes but geographically between regions, especially between north and south, and between thriving cities and failing towns within the same region. Last year, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified the 30 worst places for social mobility. Every single one of them voted to leave. I do not think that is a coincidence. The Prime Minister's mantra about bringing the country back together rings very hollow in the light of the evidence.

[Caroline Lucas]

Welfare cuts since 2010 have cost lone parent households an average of more than £5,000, increasing child poverty rates in those households from 37% to 62%. The NHS has endured the longest period of austerity in its history. The evidence goes on. Today has to be the day we start to change the conversation about Brexit and the future of Britain. We have to do that not by slavishly repeating that Brexit is the will of the people, but by genuinely hearing the voices of those who have been economically and politically excluded for decades. The millions of people who rightly chose to give the establishment an almighty kicking in June 2016 deserve to have their concerns addressed and properly resolved.

A people's vote, if it learns the lessons from the failed remain campaign of 2016, can be the vehicle we need to have that honest debate in this country. It would be the chance to move on from the divisive and dangerous place we are in by committing to "Project Hope", rather than "Project Fear". Whoever is in No. 10 must be someone who can put the issue back to the people, because a general election fought by the two biggest parties, which both have a commitment to Brexit, does not take us forward. While I of course want to get rid of this toxic Government, I also want to ensure that we resolve this most pressing issue and get the question back to the people. Parliament has shown itself to be incapable of resolving it; the question needs to go back to the people.

5.50 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): As ever, it is a huge pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). We have heard a lot about polls today. I will give the House a couple. We all know the figures of 52% and 48%, and it is intrinsic and behoves the House to respect the referendum result, but another figure is 34%, which is the current polling for the Labour party. That is quite incredible at this time. The reasons for that figure were encapsulated by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), who said that the shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the House are simply unfit for high office. As people get closer to the potential of a buy-in decision, they will see that very starkly indeed. The other reason for the 34% polling is the six tests—the magic unicorn tests—which are designed to fail. The public are not foolish and they are not going to be hoodwinked. They know intrinsically that the six tests are sophistry of the most politically contemptible sort. At some point—later today, or tomorrow—the grown-ups will have to have a conversation about what the Opposition actually want.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): What people and businesses in Basingstoke tell me is that they want certainty. How can they get certainty when there are challenges in the Government, and Parliament rejected the Government's plans yesterday?

Julian Knight: Certainty is all. I will be speaking about that in the Adjournment debate later—Jaguar Land Rover wants certainty, too. It is a little rich when people talk about the rights of EU citizens and UK citizens and then reject a deal that would protect those rights.

A second referendum would be a stain on this Parliament. The division would be enormous, and we have been entrusted. No deal makes no sense to me with the dislocation that it could cause to our economy. People talk about stockpiling, emergency provision and so on, but the reality would be what happens when the stocks run out or if we end up with dislocation. What happens if we then have to go to the EU and negotiate certain terms at that point? We would be in a very weak position. Both those options are out, so we have to come together sensibly.

Despite this stunt today—we will see Members filling up their Facebook pages with how many different times they can say different words to link in with their Momentum groups—it is time for sensible, grown-up people to face the consequences of the circumstances we are in. That is what the public want. They do not like this spectacle at all.

Let me look at the achievements of this Government. In 2010, we inherited a deficit at 11% of GDP. Let me be clear to the House that that is such an enormous sum that it cannot be borrowed for very long. Eventually, the markets call in the loans and the country ends up having to pay such a high interest rate that the economy ends up in a depression.

We, as a Government, had to sort that out, but we did it while protecting the NHS. We have announced an increase in NHS spending that is twice the level that Labour proposed at the 2017 general election. Not everything is perfect in that respect, and there are issues, but we are trying to solve them. When it comes to the big matter of the economy, however, to jobs, to healthcare, to the 1 million kids in better or outstanding schools, the Government are delivering. We have to get through Brexit and then we will deliver more.

5.54 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The provocation for this debate was the unprecedented defeat of the central plank of the Government's policy, which should have led seamlessly to a general election. In the Brexit debate earlier this week, I spoke about the threat that Brexit posed to the prosperity, opportunities and security of my constituents and many of my businesses, but I also represent some of the poorest communities in the UK, and although I am proud of the work it does, I am not proud to have the busiest food bank in London.

Last week, I spent an afternoon at one of St Mungo's homeless hostels in West Kensington talking to residents and staff. They told me that the annual street homelessness count, to be published on 31 January, would show it had doubled in the last year, and they gave me three reasons: universal credit, the increase in no recourse to public funds and tenancy takeover, which is where drug dealers seize the premises of vulnerable tenants. The war on the poor, the hostile environment and a descent into lawlessness are three of the worst consequences of austerity.

The cuts in police numbers, especially neighbourhood officer numbers, is putting whole communities at risk. I spent part of new year's eve at a crime scene in Fulham. An attempted murder led to the arrest of 40 people and the recovery of a number of dangerous weapons. I estimate that half the people I now see in my surgery have problems that would have made them eligible for legal aid before the passage of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

Yesterday, my clinical commissioning group, looking to make £44 million of cuts to its budget, began consulting on reducing opening hours for urgent care centres and GPs. That is not just bad in itself but in direct contradiction to the NHS strategy that calls for an extension of those services to justify the closures of A&Es and emergency beds. For the first time in a generation, we are seeing year-on-year real-terms cuts to school budgets. Inner-city schools do not just educate but give emotional and practical support to families struggling with poverty and poor living standards.

Perhaps the Government's worst betrayal is the 80% cut—100% under the former London Mayor—to funding for social housing when 800,000 people are on waiting lists. My local council and the Mayor of London are doing the best they can to alleviate the conditions I have described, but for real change we need a Labour Government. The Prime Minister's legacy will be to have ruined this country in half the time it took the Thatcher and Major Governments. Enough is enough. We need a general election and a Labour Government.

5.57 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): This debate should be one of two halves. First, it is right that the Opposition challenge the Government on their record, but the second part ought to be that the Opposition seek to become the Government themselves and present a vision for the country, but they have demonstrably failed to demonstrate one that they could deliver in a few weeks if they won an election. That part has been wholly absent from this debate so far.

On referendum day three years ago, I spent a lot of time talking to constituents and visiting polling stations around my constituency in Wigan and Bolton, and it was startling. The polling stations in the poorest neighbourhoods and communities had turnouts they had never seen before—far higher than for local and general elections. This vote, this referendum on the EU, reached out in a way that politicians here had not done before, or at least not for decades. That is one of the key reasons it is so important to respect the referendum decision. People who perhaps had never voted before, or at least not for decades, or who thought that previous elections were not important enough for them to engage with, chose in this referendum to engage with politics and the life of the country. It is vital for the Government to respect that decision now. We are leaving the European Union on 29 March this year. If that decision is delayed by the suspension or even the cancellation of article 50, it will be a sign to the electorate—to all voters, whether leave or remain—that their decision is being disrespected. Worse still, if there is a second referendum to dismiss the first, we will be telling them, “Your vote was wrong; get it right the second time.” That is repugnant, and it would be deeply damaging to our democracy.

I urge the Government to focus on delivering Brexit, to focus on delivering on 29 March and to use the days that we have left as an opportunity to secure the best possible deal from the European Union; but on 29 March, we must leave.

6 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I will vote for the motion, not just because of the Government's failure on Brexit but because of their

failure on so many issues, including rising crime, the railways, the social care disaster and the schools budget. I think that the speech of the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) encapsulated that better than any other.

Brexit, however, is on everyone's mind. We have to ask why the Government are unable to deliver on Brexit, and we have to conclude that it is fundamentally because the Conservative party is split. It is absolutely divided. We saw that in the Lobbies last night, but we have also seen it in the record number of resignations from this Prime Minister's Government: 32 in just three years. That is another dreadful record, which shows that this Government are incapable of governing.

Julian Knight: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman knows how many Opposition Front Benchers have resigned since the current Leader of the Opposition came to power.

Sir Edward Davey: I was actually going to mention the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), who said in his speech that the motion might unite the Conservatives. It probably will, because a rafter of turkeys ain't gonna vote for Christmas, but the ultimate division is still there. That should worry people throughout the country, because this Government and the Conservative party are incapable of delivering Brexit, as they have shown over the last two and a half years.

The right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) was right: the Government must now reach across the aisles and talk to all parties. They must get Parliament to deliver in this policy area. If they are to succeed in doing that, they will do three things. Article 50 must be extended, no deal must be taken off the table, and the Government must make it clear that when a deal is agreed, it will be put to the British people with the option of remaining in the EU. That, I think, could produce consensus, could deliver, and could bring the House together.

At present, we hear the Conservatives blaming everyone but themselves. They blame the remainers; they blame the Opposition; and they blame the Governor of the Bank of England. Sometimes I think they are going to blame sunshine, moonlight, good times and the boogie. However, there is only one group to blame, and it is the Conservative party.

6.2 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Many people ask me—and, I dare say, every Member of Parliament—“Why on earth would you go into politics?” They ask it particularly at times like this, but I know the answer, and I know the answer as a Conservative. I went into politics because I believe to my bones in social mobility. Let me make it crystal clear that I expect there are Members throughout the House who believe in that, but the issue that divides us is how to come up with solutions: how to go about achieving it, how to unlock potential, how to seek out the treasure that is in the heart of every man and woman.

I know that it is as a Conservative Member of Parliament that I have been able to provide opportunities in my community in Cheltenham that have allowed people to fulfil that potential. People say, “Cheltenham? For goodness' sake, it must be the most affluent place in the country.”

[Alex Chalk]

Not a bit of it: we have some of the most deprived communities anywhere in the country, where people live in generational, entrenched poverty.

What has the Conservative party done for my community? It has provided £22 million for a cyber-park in Cheltenham that will allow the finest minds to come in and out of GCHQ, and to create start-ups. If a person living nearby has come from generational poverty but something about them says, "I want to better myself, I want to go forward, I want to provide for my family and I want to build a future," that opportunity exists. More than £400 million has been provided for a road project. Some might say, "Who cares about a road project?" Road projects are what allow a local community to thrive; they allow opportunities to be generated and futures created.

But it is not just about infrastructure projects. Recognising the issue of homelessness, it is this Government who provided £1.3 million for social impact bonds. That means there is one-on-one support for individuals who can go and address the needs of the most vulnerable in our society: those suffering from drug addiction, or mental health problems, or debt. That has served to make a huge difference in my community, so it is not just a stronger community economically, but a fairer one, too. Moreover, £3 million has been made available to help deliver social housing in Cheltenham, in Portland Place.

Of course there is always room for improvement and always more to do, but on the issue of social mobility which is the party that is not just talking the talk but walking the walk? It is this Government who are achieving that and who are making a difference in my community, and that is why I will vote against this motion tonight.

6.5 pm

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Since I came into the House in 2001, I have seen a significant increase in the number of Members across the political divides who have spoken and voted in favour and defence of this United Kingdom. I and the people at home are eternally grateful for that, and I am sure that is shared across the divide.

I will be voting against the motion tonight, because I retain confidence in this Government on the terms and conditions contained in the confidence and supply agreement we entered into some time ago. But I want at this stage to offer a piece of critical advice to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In the past year and a half, her negotiations have not best served this United Kingdom, but the scale of last night's defeat can offer her and us an opportunity for a revised position from her. She should go back to the EU and make it clear, which she has not done until now, that whenever they say, "A deal is only doable if it contains the backstop that we have arranged and agreed with you," she will reply, "An agreement is doable, but not on the terms and conditions of that backstop, because it creates a division—a cleavage, a divorce—within our United Kingdom and we are not prepared to enter into any agreement that is based on that backstop." It is only when she gets to that stage that we get Mr Juncker last night, after realising the scale of the defeat and what might emerge beyond last night's defeat in subsequent

weeks, making a statement that has not been commented on: that they, the EU, are determined to get a deal. He was not saying that six months ago or six weeks ago, but he is saying it now because the appearance of no deal on the horizon has suddenly galvanised the EU nation states, and our Prime Minister must take advantage of that now. She must say to the EU, "We are prepared to get a deal, but we are prepared to get a good deal and a reasonable deal"—not a one-way deal like the deal that fell last night, but a deal that delivers both for the UK and the EU. It is on that basis that I will be voting against the motion tonight.

6.8 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I rise to speak because I believe this Government are the right Government to carry on with their serious work not just on Brexit, but so many other important issues affecting our daily lives, and because I believe a chain of events that might lead to a general election will in no way be good for the country, and because I am genuinely fearful of what might happen if this great country, but especially our businesses, should get into the hands of the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn); should he ever get hold of the tiller, this country will not be in safe hands. An election will certainly not solve the impending business at hand, which is delivering on our relationship with the EU.

I believe that this Government are the best Government to deliver for us, not just nationally but locally. That is what is really important to me, as the MP for Taunton Deane. Since the Conservatives have been in power in my constituency, we have delivered more than any other Government. There are more people in work there than ever before, and more small and medium-sized enterprises are being set up. There is more funding coming our way, thanks to the strong economy. That is why my calls for £79 million for new theatres in the hospitals were agreed to and accepted, and it is why we got an additional £11 million for more health services locally.

We have had more funding for infrastructure—£28 million—and we are upgrading the A358, the Toneway and the motorway junction. We got £7 million to enable a road through Staplegrave, where more housing is being built. We are building more housing than ever before in Taunton Deane, and that is because of the strong economy. There is a great deal going on. More children in Taunton Deane are getting a better education than ever before, and we are building a new special school. All these things are possible only because of the strong economy and because of our understanding of what business needs. We have cut Labour's astonishing deficit by four fifths, which has restored the public finances. Finally, it will not surprise people that I want to touch on the environment. This Government have an unparalleled record on working for the environment, and we must continue with that great work. That is another good reason why we need to leave the EU.

I am backing the Prime Minister. She will come up with a deal, and we must do this through compromise. We must work as a team on these Benches and we must listen to the other side, but we must pull off Brexit. I am confident that this Government, with their track record on the economy and all the other things they have delivered, including on the environment, are the right Government to do that successfully and fairly so that

we leave future generations able to carry on the good work that we have set in place, to live in a fair and wonderful economy and to take this great nation into the future.

6.11 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The famous phrase is that a fish rots from the head down. It is a recognition that bad leadership infects all that it touches, and what greater example of that could there be than this present Government? The rot is not confined to Downing Street; it is infecting the whole country. Not strong and stable, but stubborn and self-obsessed. Brexit is by far the clearest, but by no means the only, example. The Prime Minister has turned Brexit into a bizarre modern-day Schleswig-Holstein question. Palmerston claimed that question to be so complicated that only three people understood it: one was dead; one had been driven mad by it; and one had forgotten it altogether. The truth is, however, that this is not a complicated situation. It is the Prime Minister's red lines that have killed her deal; it is her red lines that have driven this Parliament mad; and it is her red lines that are now best forgotten.

This infectious failure has covered all the bases. This is a Government who cannot organise a tailback on the M20. They are presiding over a shortage of nurses, while stockpiling fridges. They are alienating our EU citizen neighbours, while deporting our Windrush families. They are a Government obsessed with what stickers are on the Speaker's wife's car, while ignoring pleas for help with issues such as knife crime. The roll call goes on and on. Universal credit, homelessness, the cost of living, the refugees crying out for sanctuary, the human rights of the women of Northern Ireland—at every turn, this Government cannot get a grip, and those burning injustices burn harder as a result.

This country is divided, and this Parliament is divided. The deadlock is deepening, not dissolving, and the Prime Minister cannot even be bothered to pick up the phone. No party can continue to prevaricate while the far right grows stronger. That will not stop with Brexit, and Brexit does not deal with the crisis of confidence in our politics that we all now face. We are not the only country facing difficult choices or challenges, but we are the only country that thinks that, because we are the mother of all democracies, there is nothing wrong with how we approach things. Change has to come, for all our sakes, but for that to happen, it has to start at the top and we have to stop the rot.

6.14 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I rise to speak on the behalf of not just Brenda from Bristol, but all the Brendas in Bexhill and Battle, who are probably thinking right now, "The last thing we want is a general election, but we want our Parliament and all our MPs to work better together to fix the issues of our day." I have enjoyed this afternoon because I have had the opportunity to listen to many feelings, hopes and aspirations, but it depresses me that people would still rather shout at each other instead of reaching out, identifying issues that are common to us all and trying to fix them.

I am proud of the things that the Government have helped me deliver in my constituency since my election in 2015. All my secondary schools are now good or

outstanding. Last Friday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care spent time seeing how our health service is joined up with our social care team, and it made me proud to see amazing leaders working as one, which is a good example for Parliament.

Of course, I am not naive, and I recognise that the Opposition must oppose and that the Government must govern. I am also not so naive as to say that there are no big challenges in my constituency. For example, I will be setting up a taskforce on homelessness because I have noticed the streets in Bexhill getting worse. I have also noticed more casework from my constituents because services are not available at the levels they once were.

Many of the points made by Opposition Members are therefore correct. Equally, however, we now have more people in employment than ever before. Things cannot be as bad as Opposition Members say, but perhaps they are not as good as Government Members sometimes say. If we all took that attitude and worked out how to fix the things that really matter to people, we might also be able to fix the issues of Brexit.

I want to touch on something that I thought would have been fixed by now when I was elected in 2015—social care reform. It is within us in this House to fix things for the most vulnerable and elderly people in our communities. We agree on so much. The Opposition talk about a wealth tax, and the Conservative manifesto talked about people paying more. We are almost there, and yet our occasional hatred for each other stops us reaching out.

When it comes to reaching out, there is one thing that I would like my Government to do to show that they really are listening, and it relates to the £65 charge for EU citizens to maintain the same rights that they enjoyed before the referendum. That does not feel fair to me, and I speak to many Members on both sides of the Chamber who feel the same. If the Government are listening, they should reach out to every Member who agrees with me, be they leaver or remainer, and offer that olive branch. If we start doing things that way, perhaps people will appreciate that the Government are listening and perhaps then we will work better together in the manner that all our constituents expect.

6.17 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have no confidence in this Government and I never have done. I have no confidence because of how the Department for Work and Pensions treats people. I have no confidence because of the constituent who was sanctioned because they were visiting their dying father. I have no confidence because another constituent was sanctioned while waiting to start a job with the DWP. I have no confidence because of the way people on the personal independence payment are treated. I have no confidence because of how the two-child policy and the rape clause have been pursued against vulnerable women in our society: they must be scrapped. I have no confidence because of the closure of Glasgow's jobcentres.

I have no confidence in the Government because of the implementation of the hostile environment, with refugees having been left waiting and constituents unable to be with their families. I have no confidence because of the constituent who lost out on his wife's visa because he was £7 under the threshold. I have no confidence in the Government because of the good character test that is being applied to children, some of whom cannot get

[Alison Thewliss]

citizenship because the Government think they are not of good enough character. While speaking of good character, I have no confidence in the Government because the Home Office told my constituent that he could not get citizenship because he had volunteered with the Red Cross and that that was a sign of bad character. I have no confidence in the Government because of their pursuance of section 322(5) of the immigration rules, whereby people have lost out on leave to remain because they had made a legitimate change to their tax returns that the Government thought was somehow wrong.

I have no confidence in the Government because of their abject failure to deal with Scottish limited partnerships and to reform Companies House. It is almost as if they like money laundering in this country. I have no confidence in the Government because of their refusal, despite all the evidence, to allow Glasgow to pursue supervised drug consumption rooms. It is expected that drug deaths in Scotland will top 1,000 this coming year, but the Government refuse to act for ideological reasons, so I have absolutely no confidence in them.

I have no confidence in the Government because they fail to realise that young people deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. They think that under-25s are not worth the same when they go out to work. This pretently living wage fails to give people the dignity in work that they deserve.

I have no confidence in the Government because of their failure to tackle the real and present danger that Brexit will cause to all our constituents. They have put their head in the sand and are refusing to accept that the single market and the customs union are the best way forward.

I do have confidence in the people of my constituency. I have confidence in the people of Glasgow and the people of Scotland who voted for independence with such hope in 2014, and I know that when Scotland gets its chance again it will have no confidence in this Government and lots of confidence in itself.

6.20 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am sure that at some point in your life, Mr Speaker, it is possible that you have owned a copy of that famous political book "The Downing Street Years" by Margaret Thatcher. If so, given your memory, you may well recall its very first words: "Ayes, 311. Noes, 310." That was the result of the no-confidence vote in 1979 that brought Margaret Thatcher to power. How would my colleagues feel if, as they browse in a bookstore a few years from now, they see a copy of "The Downing Street Years" by the Leader of the Opposition and the opening sentence is a narrow victory in a vote of no-confidence that led to a new era in British politics? We all know that new era would not be like the previous one to which I have referred.

That vote in 1979 ushered in an era in which free enterprise returned to the heart of British politics. We went through a difficult period of adjustment in our economy, which culminated in the end of socialism and the fall of the Berlin wall—the greatest victory in the history of modern conservatism. Such a vote tonight would bring in a different era and all that would be

turned back. There would be a return to nationalisation, command and control, the idea that the state knows best and confiscatory tax rates. Not education, education, education but regulation, regulation, regulation.

I am proud to speak from the Conservative Benches tonight. I became a Conservative after seeing what it was like in eastern Europe and because of my experience of the true face of that supposedly compassionate ideology. Those who turned a blind eye to it should be ashamed.

I started with Callaghan and I finish with Callaghan—not the former Labour Prime Minister but Detective Inspector Harry Callahan of the San Francisco police department. To anyone who thinks it is a good idea for Labour to win the no-confidence vote tonight and then get into power, all I can say is, "I hope you're feeling lucky."

6.22 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Some Conservative Members have been calling into question the motivations of the Opposition in calling this no-confidence vote. Let us be clear that yesterday's vote was not just a defeat but a complete and utter rout. Some Members have talked about historical parallels, but if yesterday's vote had been a battle, it would compare with the battle of Cannae, in which Hannibal annihilated the Roman army. It was a textbook defeat, just like last night was a textbook example of arrogance and hubris in government.

Last night's vote aside, let me run through the myriad reasons why the Opposition and I have no confidence in the Government. In-work poverty is at 4 million people, and homelessness is soaring. Yesterday, we learned in Norwich and Norfolk that 38 of our 53 children's centres are being closed. Why? Because Norfolk County Council says that the Government's cuts are forcing that to happen. It was a day of complete shame in my city. Without a hint of irony, the Government, while closing down our children's centres, have declared Norwich an opportunity area as they attempt to improve failing social mobility. It is a policy akin to attempting to fill up a bath with no plug.

In education, schools face real-terms funding cuts. In *The Guardian* today Norfolk County Council, in the media again, is under fire from the local government ombudsman for failing to address concerns and look after children with special educational needs.

On mental health, after the Prime Minister personally promised to improve that Cinderella service, Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust has been put into special measures again—that makes three times in four years, which is a first for any trust in the country. In this day and age, real-terms funding is down by 13% but demand is up by 50%.

Let me deal with an issue that the House and, in particular, the Government have failed to adequately address: the impending climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss. Above all else, given the timescales we are talking about, this is a calamity waiting to happen, but the Government are comprehensively failing on it. Time after time, we hear the greenwash from Conservative Members that they will do what it takes on the environment. They slashed solar subsidies, with 9,000 job losses; and fracking has been announced, put forward and is now actually happening, and not just in this country—they are also doing it in China, with taxpayers' money. The climate science tells us that we need to leave that gas in

the ground—80% of it—and that this cannot happen. In the words of that legend of Norwich, Delia Smith, I say to those on the Government Benches, “Let’s be ‘avin’ you.” Let us have that general election. Let us have that vote. Support this motion.”

6.25 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): There are moments in this Chamber for political knockabout, for consensus and for constructive debate, and I am very disappointed that when we have such a momentous decision to make about how we take forward our exit from the EU, we are having this debate today. I appreciate that yesterday’s vote is a reason why it has been called, but this would have been made slightly better had the Leader of the Opposition been able to give a clear answer on his position on Brexit in the months and months in which he has been asked about it. All he has been able to do is say that he wants a general election, and he continues to say that. I sincerely hope that after this evening, when I believe he will lose this vote, he will move on and start giving some clarity on his position on Brexit. It is simply not fair to the country that the Opposition cannot put together their position, at this point in time, when I recognise that here in Parliament we need to come together and solve how we leave the EU.

That is what businesses, particularly in my constituency, are calling on us to do. They are asking us to get on with it. What I also hear from businesses more often than not is that their concern is not so much about the uncertainty of Brexit, but about what would happen if the Leader of the Opposition were to become Prime Minister. It is what would happen if his party and his hard-left version of Labour were to take charge of our economy and our country, because that would be the worst possible thing for our country. I would have no confidence, on behalf of my constituents, in what he and his Government would do for our economy, for our security or even for our public services. He may claim to be a champion of our public services, but not only would they be completely unsustainable and unfundable under his economic model, but I have no confidence that he would be able to improve their performance. We have done that in government, whether in schools, where children are now learning to read, which is fundamental to their having better opportunities in life, or in the NHS. As we heard last week, we now have a long-term plan for a sustainable national health service, and funded sustainably.

I look forward to our continuing to deliver on these commitments in government, but first we need to deliver Brexit. These are difficult times, not just in the UK, but for countries across the western world. We need to come together, move forward, deliver on Brexit, continue making Britain a better place to live and build our place in the world outside the EU.

6.28 pm

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): I rise in support of the Leader of the Opposition’s motion. As a teacher and headteacher throughout my career, trust has always been important to me: the trust children had in me as their teacher, and the trust that teachers had in me as their headteacher, to understand their needs and make the right decisions on their behalf. Trust in relationships

and in the workplace is crucial. Today’s debate is not about whether the Prime Minister has the ability to make decisions on our behalf; it is about whether we trust her to understand the mood of the country, the zeitgeist, and the needs of every region and demographic, and make the right decisions. The Government have suffered the biggest parliamentary defeat in history, been found in contempt of Parliament, overseen the steepest rise in poverty and averaged a resignation per month.

I trust the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Front-Bench team as people who understand the struggles that many in our country are facing. I trust them to have the compassion and intellect to understand and empathise with the people of this country, and to be able to make the decisions that will improve all our lives.

Is the Prime Minister a good public servant? Yes. Does she work hard? Yes. Do I respect her? Yes—I respect anyone who devotes their life to public service. But is the Prime Minister a diplomat? Does she show warmth and empathy? Is she able to negotiate with the other 27 countries in the EU, in our interests? Clearly not. I do not trust our Prime Minister to represent our country and negotiate a deal that is in the best interests of the people of Colne Valley—my constituents—or our country.

For me, this is not just about whether we are in the EU or not; it is about the kind of society that I want my granddaughter to live in. Just before Christmas, my five-year-old granddaughter came into Parliament for the first time, and she loved it. Fast forward 30 years to when she is a grown woman—do I want her to inherit the world determined by this Government? No, I do not. I wonder how she will judge the Government’s handling of Brexit when she is a grown woman. I see it as a full-blown display of incompetence, focused purely on party interests, and as a failure to take strong action to protect jobs and the economy, workers’ rights, environmental protections and national security.

I do not trust the Government with my constituents’ future, my granddaughter’s future or our country’s future. I have, therefore, no confidence in the Government. I do trust a person like the Leader of the Opposition to understand diplomacy.

6.31 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): When I was elected, my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent South were clear: they voted overwhelmingly for Brexit and overwhelmingly in rejection of what the Labour party has become and now stands for. The Momentum-led Labour party does not represent predominantly working-class communities like mine in the midlands and the north. Years of Labour have done nothing to improve my city, Stoke-on-Trent—quite the reverse, with our local industries decimated and our local communities taking the brunt and being left behind.

Since Conservatives came to power, Stoke-on-Trent’s industries have started to blossom again, with record numbers of people working, and the best place to start a new business is now Stoke-on-Trent. This success is thanks to the hard work of our businesses and our communities, yes, but most significantly it is thanks to the policies of Conservatives. We have seen a Government who have transformed our economy, from the ruins of

[Jack Brereton]

Labour's crash to one of the most successful developed economies. Having supported local businesses to grow, invest and take on more people, we have seen more than 3.4 million more people in work, with unemployment at a record low; measures to keep taxes low; and the introduction of a national living wage. A basic-rate taxpayer is now more than £1,200 better off than they were in 2010—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I know the House is excited, but the hon. Gentleman must get a respectful hearing.

Jack Brereton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We must continue to pursue measures that will help to address the cost of living, and we must focus on growing aspirations, creating better opportunities and improving job prospects for our communities. That would be threatened by a Labour Government led by the Leader of the Opposition. Labour's unfunded plans for £1 trillion of extra spending would see us racking up huge debts and would mean massive tax rises for people in constituencies like mine who can least afford them. And for what? For ideologically motivated white elephants, nationalisation of our industries, and the raiding of the public purse to pursue policies that have been tried and have failed time and again, threatening jobs, our industries and our economic prosperity. Every time we have had a Labour Government, they have left our country with more people out of work than when they started.

As I have said many times before, my constituency, Stoke-on-Trent South, voted overwhelmingly to leave. At every opportunity, I have voted in this House to enact Brexit and deliver on the wishes of my constituents. For this House to go against what the British public and most of my constituents voted for would be a total betrayal of democracy, but that is what a significant proportion of Opposition MPs want. They have repeatedly voted for measures to thwart Brexit, frustrating and trying to prevent or delay us from leaving on 29 March. This motion shows that the Labour leadership would rather play party politics than put the national interest and our country first. The Labour leader has been clear: they want a general election, going against the majority who are fed up with politicians and want us to get on with delivering for our country.

6.35 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): When I think of the confidence that I have in this Government, I think about how they have treated the most vulnerable people in our country. When I think of my constituents, I think of a 10-year-old boy who was orphaned when his mother died. Instead of nurturing him, trying to care for him and providing him with security, this Government threatened to deport him. That was a most shameful act and a disgrace, and it is typical of this Government's hostile environment policy. For that and many other reasons, I have no confidence in this Government. It is about how they have treated my constituents and many vulnerable people across this country. It is also about how they have handled this negotiation in such a feckless and dysfunctional manner. They could not agree ahead of time what their negotiating objectives were. There was no spirit of collaboration,

even after the Prime Minister lost her majority in this place. There was no attempt on a collegial basis to agree negotiating objectives for this country and to deliver in the national interest of this country. That was not achieved. Indeed, this Government have subverted democracy at every turn when it suited their interests, even though they do not command a majority of the popular consent of the people, or even a majority in this House of Commons.

Even though this is a hung Parliament, the Government have packed their Select Committees with Tory majorities by procedural sleight of hand. They repeatedly seek to circumvent or abuse the Sewel convention in their dealings with the devolved Administrations. Indeed, this Government became the first Administration in parliamentary history to be held in contempt of Parliament.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in Scotland, people will be watching this thinking it is an absolute shambles? The Government rode roughshod over us and we have no trust, no faith at all, in this Government. We need a general election now.

Mr Sweeney: Absolutely. We need a general election because there is no way to clear this impasse. There is a clear lack of faith in the Government and a clear lack of will from the Government to engage productively to reach out to build a national consensus to achieve the way forward. It is now the job of Parliament to take control. The only way to do that is to reset the clock, have a general election and allow a new mandate to be formed in the interests of delivering for the people of this country. That is the only way to do it. That is why I will be supporting the motion of the Leader of the Opposition tonight to bring down this failing Government and to deliver a mandate that will act in the national interest of this country.

Mr Speaker: Two minutes. I call Luke Graham.

6.37 pm

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I will try to keep my contribution very short. I rise tonight in support of the Government, mainly because I hear the frustrations of the people in this country. I hear them from my constituents and we hear them in this House. There is confusion on our split party position. We are criticised for the red lines, but all we hear from Labour are its blurred lines, its lack of clear direction and its inability to come forward with a constructive alternative to the Government's proposals.

Parties of all colours failed to make a constructive case for the United Kingdom's position in the European Union. Many contributions in this Chamber this afternoon have lamented that fact. Many of them have been driven by anger, which is fine; anger is an easy emotion and it is one that many of our constituents feel. However, when party politics fail and policies fall down, MPs need to step up. That is what we need to do in the coming weeks.

What has come from the defeat last night is a clear determination from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to reach out across this Chamber, to come back with different proposal and to listen to people from across the political spectrum—not those who turn up in this Chamber and say they work in the national

interest, but only work in the nationalist interest, but those MPs who are here genuinely to serve their constituents and to protect and preserve our United Kingdom.

It is incredibly easy to criticise, but as Members of Parliament we cannot abdicate our responsibilities for what we were elected to do. Our constituents do not want another general election. They want us to get on with our jobs.

6.39 pm

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): This has been a very passionately argued debate. At my count, 59 Members gave speeches, and they were not holding back. The scene was set by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who said that the Prime Minister must accept the verdict of the House last night. The necessity for that was underpinned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), who highlighted the fact that she is a Prime Minister with no majority and no authority. That is perhaps why the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) talked about the Prime Minister's record lack of humility and the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), in what I thought was a soulful speech, spoke of the Government's arrogant approach to these negotiations. Why is that so important? Because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, the UK is more divided and fearful for the future than ever before.

We have had some comic moments in this debate. I was particularly amused by the contribution of the hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman); his "Life of Brian" speech—an homage to one of the greatest satirical farces in British film history—was very appropriate for the times we are in. The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) also talked about the Conservative party re-bonding in the Lobby tonight.

I cannot fail to note the passionate and sometimes breathless critiques of the last nine years of austerity economics by colleagues on the Opposition Benches, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). And a special prize must go to the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who at very short notice gave a four-minute speech in three minutes by speaking 25% faster.

As the Prime Minister said in this debate, this is a "crucial moment in our nation's history",

but it is an unenviable task to summarise this debate today and to ask Members of this House to pass judgment on her stewardship of our country. First, let me say very clearly that I am not one of those people who question her motives. I agree with the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who said that she was motivated by public duty. I do not doubt that she has sincerely attempted to fulfil the task given to us by the voters in this referendum. I have no doubt, too, that she has tried her best and given it her all. But she has failed, and I am afraid the failure is hers and hers alone. I am certain that every Member of this House admires her resilience. To suffer the humiliations on a global stage that she has done would have finished off weaker people far sooner. Yet the reality is that, if the Prime Minister really sat down and thought carefully about the implications for our country of last night's defeat, she would have resigned.

Throughout history, Prime Ministers have tried their best and failed. There is no disgrace in that—that's politics. But this Prime Minister has chosen one last act of defiance, not just defying the laws of politics, but defying the laws of mathematics. It was Disraeli who said:

"A majority is always better than the best repartee."

The Prime Minister is without a majority for a flagship policy, with no authority and no plan B. The result last night was 432 to 202. That is not a mere flesh wound. No one doubts her determination, which is generally an admirable quality, but misapplied it can be toxic. The cruellest truth of all is that she does not possess the necessary skills—the political skills, the empathy, the ability and, most crucially, the policy—to lead this country any longer.

I know that there are many good people in the Government, and they will be examining their consciences as the clock runs down on these Brexit negotiations. Because the Prime Minister has refused to resign, we now face a choice between a general election to sort out this mess or continued paralysis under her leadership. But now the ante has been raised. The Government have been defeated on a Brexit plan that has been their sole reason for existing for the past two and a half years. They have not just been defeated on the most crucial issue facing our country; they have suffered the worst defeat of any British Government in history. The clock is ticking. MPs have shown that they are ready to take back control over what has been, from start to finish, a failed Brexit process. The question facing the House tonight is whether it is worth giving this failed Prime Minister another chance to go back pleading to Brussels, another opportunity to humiliate the United Kingdom and another few weeks to waste precious time. Our answer tonight must be a resounding no.

Let me remind the House why. It was this Prime Minister who chose to lay down red lines that never commanded the support of Parliament. It was this Prime Minister who refused to guarantee the rights of EU nationals who have made their lives and their homes in this country. It was this Prime Minister who time and again tried to shut Parliament out, refusing to give us a meaningful vote and refusing to release the legal advice on the deal. She has treated this place and Members on both sides of it with utter disdain.

The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said:

"the road to tyranny is paved with Executives ignoring Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 1009.]

That is what the Prime Minister has done, and so Parliament is having to assert its rightful authority. At every turn, she has chosen division over unity. She has not tried to bring the 17 million people who voted leave and the 16 million people who voted remain together. She should have tried to assure those who voted remain. Instead, she chose to placate the most extreme of her colleagues on the leave side of the debate. That has left the nation more divided than it was in June 2016.

Out on the streets, in homes, schools and hospitals, people are struggling, and they take no hope and no strength from this ailing Government. What happened to those burning injustices that the Prime Minister said it was her mission to fight when she came into office? Racism, classism, homelessness and insecure

[Tom Watson]

jobs have all grown and burned brighter than ever before, and for so much of this, she is responsible. If the House declares tonight that it has no confidence in the Government, it will open the possibility of a general election and a decisive change in direction for our country on Brexit and for workers, young people and our vital services.

The Prime Minister will forever be known as the “nothing has changed” Prime Minister, but something must change. Our only choice left is to change her and her Government in a general election. We know that she has worked hard, but the truth is that she is too set in her ways and too aloof to lead. She lacks the imagination and agility to bring people with her, and she lacks the authority on the world stage to negotiate this deal. Ultimately, she has failed. It is not through lack of effort or dedication, and I think the country recognises that effort. In fact, the country feels genuinely sorry for the Prime Minister—I feel sorry for her—but she cannot confuse pity for political legitimacy or sympathy for sustainable support. The evidence is clear.

I know that Government Members will want to support the Prime Minister in the vote this evening out of loyalty to the party, but everyone in this Chamber, no matter which Lobby they go through, knows in their heart that this Prime Minister is not capable of getting a deal through. Government Members know it. They know that we know they know it, and the country knows it. That is why we must act. That is why we need something new. That is why we need a general election. I commend this motion to the House.

6.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): As you know, Mr Speaker, having sat throughout this entire debate, it has been a passionate debate, characterised by many excellent speeches. I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), for Bolton West (Chris Green), for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), and for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and my hon. Friends the Members for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), for Dudley South (Mike Wood), for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on my side for a series of outstanding speeches.

It has also been the case, as the shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson), pointed out, that there have been many powerful speeches from the Opposition Benches as well. I, like him, want to pay particular tribute to the hon. Members for Warrington North (Helen Jones), for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) for moving and passionate speeches. Their constituencies are lucky to have them as advocates for their concerns and their needs.

However, perhaps the bravest and finest speech that came from the Opposition Benches was given by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock). It takes courage—and he has it, having been elected on a Labour mandate and representing working-class

people—to say that the leader of the party that he joined as a boy is not fit to be Prime Minister. He speaks for his constituents, and he speaks for the country.

That takes me to the speech from the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East. He spoke well, but I felt he did not rise to the level of events. One thing that was characteristic of his speech is that he did not once mention in his speech the Leader of the Opposition or why he should be Prime Minister. I have a lot of time for the hon. Gentleman, and we have several things in common: we have both lost weight recently—him much more so; we are both friends of Israel—him much more so; and we both recognise that the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) is about the worst possible person to lead the Labour party—him much more so.

As well as great speeches from the Back Benches, we had some interesting speeches from the Front Benches. We had a speech of over 20 minutes from my great friend, the leader of the Scottish National party in this place, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). Again, however, in those 20 minutes he did not once mention the common fisheries policy. I think everyone in Scotland who recognises the potential to free ourselves from the common fisheries policy that Brexit provides will note that, in 20 minutes of precious parliamentary time, the SNP did not mention them, is not interested in them and, as far as the fishing people of Scotland are concerned, literally has nothing to say.

I must now turn to the speech from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable)—someone for whom I also have affection and respect. He made a number of good points, but he also said that he regretted the referendum. This from a party that was the first in this House to say that we should have a referendum on EU membership. Because he does not like the result of the last referendum, he now wants another referendum. The Liberal Democrat policy on referendums is not the policy of Gladstone or Lloyd George; it is the policy of Vicky Pollard—“No, but yeah, but no, but yeah.”

I should also commend the speech given by the leader of the Democratic Unionist party in this place, the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds). He explained that he had been inundated with text messages today from people in this House saying, “Please, please, please back the Government tonight”—and some of those text messages had even come from Conservatives.

Critically, when we think about confidence in this country and in this Government, I think a daily vote in confidence is being executed by the individuals investing in this country, creating jobs and opportunity for all our citizens. Under this Government, this country remains the most successful country for foreign direct investment of any country in Europe, with more than £1,300 billion being invested in the past year. That is why *Forbes Magazine* says that this country is the best destination in the world for new jobs. It is why the independent organisation JLL says that the best place in the world for the future of services is here in the United Kingdom. It is why, once again, London has been recorded by independent inspectors as the best place in the world for tech investment. We see that when the Spanish rail firm Talgo shortlists six destinations for investment in new rolling stock, and

all six are in the United Kingdom; when Boeing opens a new factory in Sheffield to create jobs for British workers; when Chanel moves from France to London to establish a new corporate headquarters, and when Starbucks moves from Amsterdam to London to ensure more investment and jobs. The Opposition should wake up and smell the coffee. All this—in the words of the BBC—despite Brexit.

That investment—those jobs that have been created under my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's inspirational leadership—has been made in public services and social justice. As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), there are 1.9 million more children in good and outstanding schools. It is also the case that the gap between the poorest and the richest in our schools has narrowed under this Conservative Government. We have a record level of investment in the NHS and, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, a 10-year plan and £20 billion of investment—£394 million extra every week—for our NHS.

We also invest in our national security. We meet the 2% target for investment in NATO and we have two new aircraft carriers, which are capable of projecting British force and influence across the world in defence of freedom and democracy. By contrast, while we are standing up for national security, what about the right hon. Member for Islington North? He wants to leave NATO. He wants to get rid of our nuclear deterrent. He said recently in a speech, “Why do countries boast about the size of their armies? That is quite wrong. Why don't we emulate Costa Rica, which has no army at all?” No allies, no deterrent, no army—no way can this country ever allow that man to be our Prime Minister and in charge of our national security.

If the Leader of the Opposition cannot support our fighting men and women, who does he support? Who does he stand beside? It was fascinating to discover that he was there when a wreath was laid to commemorate those who were involved in the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. He says he was present but not involved. “Present but not involved” sums him up when it comes to national security. When this House voted to bomb the fascists of ISIS after an inspirational speech by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), 66 Labour Members, including the hon. Member for West Bromwich East, voted with this Government to defeat fascism. I am afraid the Leader of the Opposition was not with us. In fighting fascism, he was present but not involved.

Similarly, when this House voted to take the action necessary when Vladimir Putin executed an act of terrorism on our soil, many good Labour Members stood up to support what we were doing, but not the Leader of the Opposition. When we were fighting Vladimir Putin—

Danielle Rowley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

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

Danielle Rowley: The motion is about the Government. How is this relevant? Is this not dangerous?

Mr Speaker: If the Secretary of State were out of order, I would have said so. I did not because he is not.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

If the Leader of the Opposition will not stand up against Putin when he attacks people in this country, if he will not stand up against fascists when they are running riot in Syria, if he will not stand up for this country when the critical national security questions are being asked, how can we possibly expect him to stand up for us in European negotiations? Will he stand up for us against Spain over Gibraltar? Will he stand up against the Commission to ensure that we get a good deal? Of course he will not, because he will not even stand up for his own Members of Parliament.

Why is it that a Labour Member of Parliament needs armed protection at her own party conference? Why is it that nearly half of female Labour MPs wrote to the Leader of the Opposition to say that he was not standing up against the vilification and the abuse that they received online which had been carried out in his name? If he cannot protect his own Members of Parliament, if he cannot protect the proud traditions of the Labour party, how can he possibly protect this country? We cannot have confidence in him to lead. We have confidence in this Government, which is why I recommend that the House votes against the motion.

7 pm

Debate interrupted (Order, this day).

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 325.

Division No. 296]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Byrne, rh Liam
Abrahams, Debbie	Cable, rh Sir Vince
Ali, Rushanara	Cadbury, Ruth
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Amesbury, Mike	Campbell, rh Sir
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Alan
Ashworth, Jonathan	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Austin, Ian	Carden, Dan
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Bardell, Hannah	Champion, Sarah
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Chapman, Douglas
Beckett, rh Margaret	Chapman, Jenny
Benn, rh Hilary	Charalambous, Bambos
Berger, Luciana	Cherry, Joanna
Betts, Mr Clive	Clwyd, rh Ann
Black, Mhairi	Coaker, Vernon
Blackford, rh Ian	Coffey, Ann
Blackman, Kirsty	Cooper, Julie
Blackman-Woods, Dr	Cooper, Rosie
Roberta	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blomfield, Paul	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Brabin, Tracy	Cowan, Ronnie
Bradshaw, rh Mr	Coyle, Neil
Ben	Crausby, Sir David
Brake, rh Tom	Crawley, Angela
Brennan, Kevin	Creagh, Mary
Brock, Deidre	Creasy, Stella
Brown, Alan	Cruddas, Jon
Brown, Lyn	Cryer, John
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cummins, Judith
Bryant, Chris	Cunningham, Alex
Buck, Ms Karen	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Burden, Richard	Daby, Janet
Burgon, Richard	Dakin, Nic
Butler, Dawn	Davey, rh Sir Edward

David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate

Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart
C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla

Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds,
Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jessica Morden and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry

Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona

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

Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Purslove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy

Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shanon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, Mr Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Julian Smith and
Christopher Pincher

Question accordingly negatived.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am pleased that the House has expressed its confidence in the Government tonight. I do not take this responsibility lightly, and my Government will continue their work to increase our prosperity, guarantee our security and strengthen our Union—and yes, we will also continue to work to deliver on the solemn promise that we made to the people of this country to deliver on the result of the referendum and leave the European Union.

I believe that this duty is shared by every Member of this House. We have a responsibility to identify a way forward that can secure the backing of the House, and to that end I have proposed a series of meetings between senior parliamentarians and representatives of the Government over the coming days. I should like to invite the leaders of parliamentary parties to meet me individually, and I should like to start those meetings tonight. The Government approach the meetings in a constructive spirit, and I urge others to do the same, but we must find solutions that are negotiable and command sufficient support in the House. As I have said, we will return to the House on Monday to table an amendable motion and to make a statement about the way forward.

The House has put its confidence in this Government. I stand ready to work with any Member of the House to deliver on Brexit, and to ensure that this House retains the confidence of the British people.

Mr Speaker: I call Jeremy Corbyn.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last night the House rejected the Government's conclusion of its negotiations with the European Union—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I called the Prime Minister on a point of order, and the Prime Minister was heard. She was heard in relative tranquillity, and certainly with courtesy. The same courtesy will be extended to the Leader of the Opposition, and to others who seek to raise points of order. That is the way it is.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Last night, the House rejected the Government's deal emphatically. A week ago, the House voted to condemn the idea of a no-deal Brexit. Before there can be any positive discussions about the way forward, the Government must remove, clearly and once and for all, the prospect of the catastrophe of a no-deal Brexit from the EU, and all the chaos that would come as a result of that. I invite the Prime Minister to confirm now that the Government will not countenance a no-deal Brexit from the European Union.

Ian Blackford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I must say that I welcome the offer of talks from the Prime Minister. It is important that all of us recognise the responsibility that we have, and, on the back of the defeat of the Government's motion last night, that we have to work together where we can to find a way forward. I commit the Scottish National party to working

constructively with the Government. However, it is important in that regard that we make it clear to the Prime Minister, in the spirit of openness in these talks, that the issue of extending article 50, of a people's vote and avoiding a no deal have to be on the table. We have to agree to enter these talks on the basis that we can move forward and achieve a result that will unify all the nations of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Sir Edward Davey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. From the Liberal Democrats position, we are clear that we want to engage in talks with Her Majesty's Government, but it is important that the Government make clear that no deal is not an option. It is very important that the Prime Minister does not—as, to be fair to her, earlier today she did not—rule out extending article 50; it is important that the House has that chance to think and come together. Finally, I ask the Prime Minister to ensure that this House gets a chance to take control of our own business as we go through the next few days and weeks.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Nigel Dodds: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The result of the motion of no confidence tonight illustrates the importance of the confidence and supply arrangement currently in place between—*[Interruption.]* I am always delighted when our opponents illustrate the strength of that relationship and what it is delivering for Northern Ireland; and when the people of Northern Ireland see that investment in education and health and infrastructure, they will thank this Parliament and this party and this Government for that extra investment. *[Interruption.]* May I say this—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Stone, that is very unseemly behaviour. Normally you behave with great dignity in this place; calm yourself, man—get a grip.

Nigel Dodds: May I say, however, that the confidence and supply arrangement is of course built upon delivering Brexit on the basis of our shared priorities, and for us that is the Union, and we want to deliver Brexit, taking back control of our laws, our borders and our money, and leave the European Union as one country? Let us work in the coming days to achieve that objective.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Carmichael rose—

Mr Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman really feels he must make a point of order then he may, although he has been represented by his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey). *[Interruption.]* No, out of generosity of spirit.

Mr Carmichael: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I thank the Prime Minister for her assurance that the motion that will be brought on Monday will be amendable, and may I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, about how we on this side of the House, and indeed on the Conservative Benches as well, who want to see this matter put to a people's vote might on Monday be given the opportunity to do so, including the opportunity given to the Leader of the Opposition now that we know there is not to be a general election?

Mr Speaker: My response to the right hon. Gentleman, apart from thanking him for his point of order, is to say that if there is an amendable motion of which the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, has given notice, manifestly there will be an opportunity for people to table amendments, and we shall have then to see what happens. The right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to make a commitment in advance, but I know what he thinks and I have heard what he said.

We come now to the Adjournment—*[Interruption.]* Order. If hon. Members do not wish to hear the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) dilate on the matter of car production in Solihull, which seems an unaccountable choice on their part, I hope that they will leave the Chamber quickly and quietly so that the occupant of the Chair can hear the hon. Gentleman deliver his oration. *[Interruption.]* Order. We come now to the Adjournment, when I can divert the Whip from the attention of his hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), who is whispering into his ear, no doubt extremely meaningfully.

Car Production: Solihull

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mike Freer.)

7.25 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. We finally move to the main business of the day. Obviously, it is a great pleasure to follow the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), and I am sure that my speech will be just as resounding as his. That fantastic oration is not at all a hard act to follow.

I secured this debate prior to the announcements of job reductions at Jaguar Land Rover in the west midlands. We have unfortunately seen a slow trend over the past year, with a drip, drip of job losses in the Jaguar Land Rover group, but the announcements that have just been made are much more substantial and have brought forward the Jaguar Land Rover development partnership. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) is playing a leading part in that, as well as in the work being done in the House to promote the needs of the UK car industry, and of Jaguar Land Rover in particular. I am sure that all hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), will join me in wishing that organisation great success.

I believe that in order to take the right action to support the British car industry, and the towns and families that depend on it, politicians must have an accurate understanding of the real drivers behind the current challenges, and not allow this issue to get caught up in the arguments over Brexit, for example. I therefore want to use my speech to set out why Jaguar Land Rover is so important to Solihull and the wider west midlands economy and the real reasons behind its current difficulties. I shall also set out my recommendations for what Ministers can do to support this crucial industry.

Solihull is rightly proud of that the fact that it is one of Britain's great manufacturing towns. It is home to some of our country's most popular global brands and, as I said in the House the other day, it is one of only a few constituencies to enjoy an actual trade surplus in goods with the European Union. As a consequence, thousands of local residents are employed in those industries, including at the JLR plant at Lode Lane, and they have played a big role in shaping the character of our town.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this debate and I understand his reasons for doing so. It is also good to see other Members with a particular interest in the matter here in the Chamber. A similar situation in Northern Ireland is the Bombardier issue. Does he agree that consideration must be given to bringing work back from foreign plants—such as Slovakia in the case of Jaguar Land Rover—and to keeping jobs here in the United Kingdom? This is what should be happening with Bombardier. Does he agree that the Government should be looking at incentives to encourage the retention of jobs in the big manufacturing bases here in the United Kingdom?

Julian Knight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The way to bring jobs into the UK is to create a business environment in which investment can flourish, and that is basically the point of my speech.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this timely debate. He is right that not a lot can be said about the meetings we have had with Jaguar Land Rover, because that information is confidential, but Jaguar Land Rover is in a totally different situation from Bombardier. We want to support the hon. Gentleman, as he knows, in ensuring that Jaguar Land Rover goes on to create more jobs, and I am sure that he will want to touch on the question of the supply line. I have had a number of letters from small companies that are a bit concerned about the situation, although we have had some reassurances and there will be further discussions. I wish the hon. Gentleman all the best.

Julian Knight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I wonder whether he has seen my speech, because I am just about to mention Jaguar Land Rover's successes, which are manifest. I mentioned employment at the start of my speech, and the reality is that we have gone back to the situation that we were in in 2016.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I have a feeling that I know what he is going to say, and he will have huge and strong support from my constituents in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield due to Jaguar Land Rover's critical importance in our region.

Julian Knight: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I know for a fact that many people who work at Jaguar Land Rover live in his constituency, and the royal town of Sutton Coldfield is a close partner with Solihull in many respects, so I welcome his comment.

JLR faces serious challenges, but it is important not to allow them to eclipse what is still an encouraging picture overall. In 2010, it employed just 12,000 people in the UK. However, even after the latest reductions, it will still employ over 38,000 workers across the country, including 10,000 in Solihull—a more than threefold increase nationwide. The past eight years have also seen substantial revenue growth, from £6 billion a year to £25 billion a year—a more than fourfold increase. Over the past five years, JLR has invested some £80 billion in the UK, which is basically the same as the defence and education budgets put together. It is an enormous investment, and a further round of investment was announced alongside the job news last week.

Overall, the UK continues to enjoy the most productive automotive manufacturing sector in Europe, and productivity remains about 50% higher than the British manufacturing average. In short, Solihull remains a great place for British manufacturers and exporters, and I will do everything I can to help them succeed as part of the new Jaguar Land Rover development partnership, to which I will return later.

We must ensure that the details of this important issue are not confused or obscured. There is no doubt that our relationship with the European Union is a matter of serious concern to JLR and every other manufacturer that depends on international just-in-time supply chains, but JLR's management has been clear

that the driving forces behind the current reductions are twofold: a serious fall in demand in China and a slump in demand for diesel cars in the aftermath of the Volkswagen emissions scandal. Exposure to downturns in foreign markets is part and parcel of being an exporter, but the second reason—the fallout from the VW emissions scandal—is a problem made in Wolfsburg that is threatening jobs and investment in the UK.

For years, Governments of both parties encouraged Britons to buy diesel and, by extension, encouraged British car makers to service that need. According to Professor David Bailey, more than 90% of JLR's domestic sales are diesels. But after Volkswagen was found to have been fiddling its emissions scores, we suddenly saw a scramble to be seen to crack down on diesel, which has had predictable results. Jaguar sales are down 26% so far this year, and that pattern has been repeated across the UK car industry, where overall diesel registrations have plunged by a third since January to March 2017.

Respected economists from the Centre for Economics and Business Research have shown that such policies are hugely detrimental to the economy. Many such policies also fail to account for the huge differences between old-fashioned diesel engines and so-called cleaner diesel alternatives of the sort manufactured by Jaguar Land Rover in my constituency. Those cars are just as clean as petrol alternatives. In fact, *What Car?* recently named a diesel as its car of the year, saying that it combined the low CO₂ for which diesels are known with lower NOx output than many petrol alternatives. What is worse—this is perverse in many respects—many people are now switching to petrol without realising that they could be buying a more polluting vehicle than the diesel that they could have bought instead, perhaps at a good discount.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He is doing a great job of trying to rehabilitate the truth about new diesel engines, which will help to justify the huge investment that both JLR and the Government have put into developing them. I hope that this debate will help to disabuse people of the myths about the differences between petrol and diesel.

Julian Knight: I was recently diagnosed as asthmatic, which, for someone who cycled up mountains less than two years ago, is a frightening and life-altering experience in many respects. I am very conscious of the fact my right hon. Friend raises, but we need to get it right so that we do not end up ensuring that older polluting diesels are kept on the roads longer because people are afraid to change them as they will lose money. We need to encourage people to transition to new technology, but at the same time, we need to fill that gap with cleaner diesel until the capacity is there.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important and timely debate before us. Having worked with him and other colleagues on the automotive industry and Jaguar Land Rover, I know he shares my passion.

I think the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that the transition he describes is critical and that the Government must work with manufacturers to ensure that we get a co-ordinated, managed transition away from diesel and petrol towards cleaner fuels. Will he speak about diesel

taxation and how we should not penalise consumers but support them in the transition? That would particularly help Jaguar Land Rover.

Julian Knight: The hon. Gentleman has put his thoughts on the record. He is correct about the transition, and we cannot ask car manufacturers to move at pace to those new technologies and then take EU policy that could potentially damage the income streams that allow them to invest. We need to be nuanced and thoughtful about that while protecting our environment.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Jaguar Land Rover has invested a huge amount of money in south Staffordshire, on the border with Wolverhampton, precisely to build those engines at its engine plant. That has brought huge numbers of excellent job opportunities to both Wolverhampton and Staffordshire. Will he join me in paying tribute to its foresight on those clean engines?

Julian Knight: I certainly will, and I know the impact that investment has had on my hon. Friend's local community and on the wider west midlands economy. Those jobs are fantastic. The pay is much higher than the national average wage, which creates jobs in the local economy through the multiplier effect. They are jobs that we have to keep and develop. The key word is "transition."

Mr Jim Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Julian Knight: I am conscious of time. Sorry.

Jaguar Land Rover has announced that all new models will be electrified from 2020, and I have no doubt that other manufacturers will follow suit. It is a simple fact that we do not yet have the infrastructure to handle a wholesale shift towards electric vehicles in the near future.

As I told the House during the passage of the Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018, the current capacity for public charging points does not come close to that provided by traditional filling stations. It will take time to put the necessary infrastructure in place and, until it is ready, our environmental goals are best served by encouraging motorists to switch to cleaner, modern vehicles of all types before we get rid of the internal combustion engine by 2040.

As the MP for a car-making town, and as a former chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for fair fuel for UK motorists and UK hauliers, I am grateful for the Government's proactive approach to the sector. The previously mentioned sector deal is welcome, and I am proud to have the opportunity to serve on the new JLR development partnership, which will give the company, firms in its supply chain, trade union officials and others the opportunity to liaise directly with the Business Secretary, the Mayor of the West Midlands and other local politicians.

I also note the £500 million investment in the new advanced propulsion centre, which is intended to research, develop and industrialise new low-carbon automotive technologies, and in other initiatives such as the Faraday battery challenge and the supplier competitiveness and productivity programme. The car industry has proven

itself more than willing to collaborate with Ministers in this field, match-funding not just the advanced propulsion centre but also another £225 million for R&D investment.

We face a period of economic uncertainty, especially for exporters, as we negotiate our future relationship with the European Union and start to pursue our own independent trade policy. It is vital to the wellbeing of constituencies such as mine and the entire British economy, not to mention the Government's own long-term environmental and technological ambitions, that we do everything we can to offer stability and certainty to companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. Only then will they be able to make the investment needed to protect jobs, drive growth and make our eventual transition to electric cars a reality.

7.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this debate, although I must confess I am a little disappointed because, when I came into the Chamber, I saw lots of people, who I thought had come to listen to this debate. I thought, "Perhaps it is because of Jaguar." Jaguars are known as "supertoys" by many people. Members may aspire to owning them and I can strongly recommend them. I have had a little indication that Madam Deputy Speaker may have a product manufactured by this company. So if representatives from the company are listening, I can say that we do have her endorsement.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And the Minister.

Richard Harrington: And indeed myself, although not at taxpayers' expense. In addition, it is not a "supertoy"; it is a more modest model.

Tonight's subject is very important and I wish to thank other Members who have contributed. Jaguar Land Rover has an excellent group of MPs in the area, and I was pleased to meet them last week to discuss the announcement that was made. *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) shaking his head. I do hope I have not affronted him if I have not met him—most Members were there. If I have, I really apologise and I will make sure he is always invited.

Matt Western: I do not believe I was invited, but I very much hope that I will be invited in future.

Richard Harrington: If the hon. Gentleman was not invited, I would like to apologise to him. This was all done at the last minute. I will meet him whenever he likes, either informally or in a meeting with officials. The point I was making is that JLR is a cross-party matter, and it is treated in that way by the Government and by the company.

In the time we have, I wish briefly to outline the steps the Government have taken since JLR announced last Thursday that it will reduce its global workforce by about 4,500 people. I will then move on to address the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull. As he highlighted, the UK automotive industry remains one of our great success stories, and global demand for UK designed, engineered and manufactured vehicles

[Richard Harrington]

is strong. Our industry is regarded internationally as very productive. Our industrial strategy builds on these strengths and invests in the future, to put the UK at the forefront of the next generation of electric and autonomous vehicles. JLR is a key part of our automotive manufacturing base, supporting high-quality jobs, both directly and across the automotive supply chain.

As my hon. Friend noted, last Thursday, Jaguar Land Rover confirmed that it is offering voluntary redundancy packages to its UK workforce, to reduce the headcount. As this is a voluntary redundancy programme, the company cannot give any figures on the number of Solihull workers who might be affected. However, JLR has made it clear to us, in a call that the Secretary of State and I had with its chief executive just before the announcement, that those working on production lines are not part of this programme; this predominantly relates to marketing and management staff. I do not make light of that; these people will be made redundant—we hope it will be with their agreement—and what job they do does not particularly matter. He also stressed to us that the apprenticeship programme, which has been supported so well by my hon. Friend and other local MPs, will continue, as will graduate recruitment and the recruitment of specific staff that the company needs.

The decision to offer these redundancies is the next phase of a £2.5 billion “Charge and Accelerate” turnaround plan, which the company announced last September. As I say, I have spoken several times to the chief executive and he has explained how these redundancies will streamline the business and help to ensure the company’s long-term health for the future. As I say, I do think a lot of every member of staff and their families, who face an uncertain time. I assure the House that we are working closely with colleagues throughout the west midlands to offer whatever support we can.

We are also working to support the company itself. We have a long-standing relationship with the firm and its parent company in India. Since the turnaround plans were announced last September, we have worked even more closely with the company in support of its long-term strategy as it invests and transitions to autonomous, connected and electric vehicles.

Mr Jim Cunningham: First, one of the important factors here is that the development of the electric vehicles takes place at Whitley in Coventry. Secondly, the Minister might want to think about whether a scrappage scheme would help the situation. I do not know—it would have to be put to the company—but it struck me as something that we should perhaps think about and explore to help the company. Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) said, there is the issue of taxation. Lastly, when we talk about the labour force, it is important to remember that a lot of the labour force bought houses, certainly in my constituency and others, so we have to do as much as possible to help them if they run into difficult situations with, for example, mortgages.

Richard Harrington: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He was at the meeting last week and I know that, like other Members, he spends a lot of time with Jaguar. Let me go through his points briefly. I must

confess that I have not thought about a scrappage scheme, but I am happy to do so now, as he suggested. I will come to the matter of taxation and the electric vehicles later in my speech.

I was just about to confirm that Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and the Secretary of State convened the Jaguar Land Rover development partnership, which brought together the company and local MPs, including my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull, whom I thank for having come at short notice. Other local MPs were invited and I hope that, although I might have missed him out from my meeting, the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington was not missed out from that one. I was not there, in case there was an urgent question in the House on the subject; somebody had to be here to deal with it. I do not know whether I drew the short straw or the long one, but I intend to be there in future. It is a part of my responsibilities that I look forward to taking up. Also present were trade union representatives, trade bodies, local government and almost anyone who we felt was relevant and could be invited. The partnership is a continuing group. It heard from chief executive Ralf Speth about the significant investment that Jaguar Land Rover continues to make in the UK. He gave many examples of how the company is investing in the future, including in Solihull.

I accept the point that the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) just made about working families throughout the UK, not just in his Coventry constituency—

Mr Jim Cunningham: I did say other constituencies.

Richard Harrington: The hon. Gentleman certainly did. The lives of people throughout the UK are affected. As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull said, these are not just jobs: they are well-paid, highly skilled, well-respected jobs, and long should they continue. Jaguar Land Rover seems positive about the future. Last week, I met Steve Turner, one of the trade union representatives, and I have to say, without betraying Steve’s confidence, that I asked him what the management is really like—I have dealt with the chief executive and so on—and he said it is absolutely very good. I believe that, and I think everyone involved has confirmed that, so I am confident for the future.

Let me turn to the specific points. Jaguar has confirmed that the next-generation electric drive units will be produced at the company’s engine manufacturing centre in Wolverhampton, from later this year. The units will be powered by batteries assembled at a new JLR battery centre located at Hams Hall in Birmingham. That clearly reinforces the company’s commitment to the west midlands.

Over the past year, Jaguar Land Rover has announced investment in its key plants in Solihull and Halewood, to build the next generation of models, including electric vehicles. For Solihull in particular, in June 2018 the company announced hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in a technology upgrade to accommodate the next generation of flagship Land Rover models. Hopefully—this is certainly the intention—that will future-proof the site.

We are determined to ensure that the UK continues to be one of the most competitive locations in the world for automotive and other advanced manufacturing. My hon. Friend mentioned the automotive sector deal,

which was published just over a year ago. The Government are working with industry to invest in the future. This includes a £1 billion commitment over 10 years through the Advanced Propulsion Centre, which is very impressive. Jaguar Land Rover has benefited from this support; most recently as part of a £4.4 million project through the Advanced Propulsion Centre, and a £11.2 million one through the connected and autonomous vehicles intelligent mobility fund.

I now want to turn to other arguments made by my hon. Friend. As he rightly points out, while Jaguar Land Rover has had great success over the past decade, the number of challenges facing the company are significant. Falling sales in China has been a major factor and it has had an impact on many global automotive companies. In addition, the broad trend of declining consumer demand for diesel has had an impact.

I make no apology for the Government's bold vision on ultra low emissions vehicles, which we set out in our road to zero strategy. I am sure that, in the long run, Jaguar will be a major beneficiary of that strategy, as, of course, will be the environment of this country, Europe and, I hope, the world. We want to be at the forefront of this and aim for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040. Hopefully, by 2050 and beyond, every car will be zero emission. I agree with the critical point made by my hon. Friend: diesel plays an important role in reducing CO₂ emissions from road transport during the transition and it will continue to have an important role for years to come. We need to be clear on this point, both in our own minds and in our communication with industry, and I believe that we have been.

The Government's road to zero strategy is clear that diesel, particularly the new generation of diesel engines, is a perfectly acceptable choice environmentally and economically. For those Members who are not familiar with this document, I suggest that they look at it. There has been much talk of the Government playing a role in destroying diesel and talking it down.

Julian Knight: I am really encouraged by what the Minister has said in that regard. The reality is that the collapse in diesel is a Europe-wide issue; we know that. It is just that we need this nuance—this idea that cleaner

diesel does play a role—shouted from the rooftops, provided that the industry can show that this clean diesel does not harm the environment.

Richard Harrington: I do not have it within my power to shout from the rooftops, but I will shout from this Chamber for those people who are listening. The new clean diesels are really, really good. I confess to having a penchant for this particular kind of vehicle.

Matt Western: I thank the Minister for being so generous with his time. Let me return to this important point. He is speaking about shouting from the rooftops. Perhaps the most critical point to shout about is taxation. I appreciate the points that have just been made by the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight). There is a global issue, as we have seen in north America and across Europe, on diesel, but it is in the Government's gift to change taxation and not to penalise. The maximum vehicle excise duty addition that was put in was £560 on a vehicle.

Richard Harrington: I am bursting to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point, but I have two minutes left, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I do not want to torment your time—well, you will not let me; you would tell me not to.

My hon. Friend made the same point. I am pleased to remind the House that, on 19 December, the Treasury published a review of the impact of the worldwide harmonised light vehicles test procedure on vehicle excise duty and company car tax. The review is open until 17 September¹. Officials from the Department have been working closely with Jaguar Land Rover and others to ensure that the industry's evidence is considered in the review and I look forward to the outcome.

I congratulate my hon. Friend. He really is a major spokesman for the company, together with his colleagues. This debate is but a small part of the work that he does. My door is always open to him and to the company. I look forward to a great future for Jaguar Land Rover, and I know that the west midlands will be a key part of that.

Question put and agreed to.

7.54 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Divisions

ENERGY CONSERVATION

That the draft Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 27 November 2018, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 240.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England and Wales: Ayes 302, Noes 233.

Division No. 294]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farron, Tim
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen

Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alistair
James, Margot
Jardine, Christine
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, rh Norman
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee

Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo

Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy

Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon

Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise

Starmer, rh Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek

Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Cartlidge, James
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dowden, Oliver

Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duddridge, James
Duffield, Rosie
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellis, Michael
Ellman, Dame Louise
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elmore, Chris
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill
Eustice, George
Evans, Chris
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodman, Helen
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grady, Patrick
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grant, Peter
Gray, James
Gray, Neil
Grayling, rh Chris

Question accordingly agreed to.

UK PARTICIPATION IN THE EU AGENCY FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE COOPERATION (EUROJUST): POST- ADOPTION OPT-IN DECISION

That this House takes note of Regulation 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2002/187/JHA; endorses the Government's decision to request to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties; and supports the Government's assessment that Eurojust provides a valuable service to the UK and that opting in would enable us to maintain operational continuity and minimise disruption for UK law enforcement and prosecution authorities during the proposed Implementation Period.

The House divided: Ayes 577, Noes 20.

Division No. 295]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Ali, Rushanara
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Aragar, Edward
Ashworth, Jonathan
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Bardell, Hannah
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benn, rh Hilary
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berger, Luciana
Berry, Jake
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Bob
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Brabin, Tracy
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Braverman, Suella
Brennan, Kevin
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Buckland, Robert
Burden, Richard
Burghart, Alex
Burgon, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam

Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Green, Kate
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Carolyn
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hayman, Sue
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Hussain, Imran
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Gareth

Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Karen
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr
 Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Linden, David
 Little Pengeley, Emma
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lollobone, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, John
 Mann, Scott
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Masterton, Paul
 Matheson, Christian
 May, rh Mrs Theresa

Maynard, Paul
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, David
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nandy, Lisa
 Neill, Robert
 Newlands, Gavin
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Norris, Alex
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Perkins, Toby
 Perry, rh Claire
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Philp, Chris

Pidcock, Laura
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pound, Stephen
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rodda, Matt
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Danielle
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smith, Royston
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark

Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily

Throup, Maggie
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trickett, Jon
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vaz, Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Walker, Thelma
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles

Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wigg, Bill
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul

Williamson, Chris
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Baker, Mr Steve
 Blunt, Crispin
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cash, Sir William
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Davies, Geraint
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea

McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Paisley, Ian
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowley, Lee
 Ruane, Chris
 Smith, Henry
 Thomson, Ross
 Wilson, rh Sammy

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 January 2019

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Taxation of Low-income Families

9.30 am

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered taxation of low-income families.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. As a Conservative and a Christian, I believe passionately in the importance of caring for those families who find themselves at the bottom of the income distribution. It is vital that there is a proper, decent safety net to enable families where the adults either are not in work or cannot work to have a decent standard of living, to live in proper homes and to have a proper income. At the same time, making work pay has been a priority for the Conservative and Conservative-led Governments since 2010. In this context, the effective marginal tax rate—the proportion of any additional £1 earned that one would lose in the form of tax, national insurance and lost benefits—is the key consideration.

If we look at a one-earner, two-parent family with two children, paying income tax and national insurance and in receipt of tax credits, we see that they face an effective marginal tax rate of 73%. That means that, as they look at the prospect of earning more, they will be confronted by the fact that they will get to keep only 27p from every additional £1 earned. If a 73% higher rate tax was introduced—I recall when it was well into the 80s; indeed, on unearned income it was 98% at one point—there would be an outcry from higher earning people and probably from the whole public. Yet that is the effective marginal rate of tax that we, though the system that we in Parliament are responsible for, expect low-income families to pay.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. This is an issue that I and many others have taken an interest in for a long time. Does he agree that, particularly for those who are on full-time low pay, or part-time pay, if we gradually moved toward a position where the first £15,000 per annum was tax-free and there was no requirement to pay national insurance contributions on it, that would be a huge incentive against the black economy, as well as promoting people's getting out of the working tax credits system and into employment, to try to work their way up through the salary chain?

Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. I shall refer to three reports today, but this one, "Make Work Pay: A New Agenda for Fairer Taxes" by the Centre for Policy Studies, suggests a tax and national insurance-free income of, I think, £12,000 a year, which is similar to what he suggests. I have a lot of sympathy for that. I would counsel against those who say that national insurance is a thing of the past and totally irrelevant; I believe in the importance of a social insurance contribution-based system, provided

that it is progressive and proportionate, and I would not like to lose that, but I entirely agree with the principle of what he says.

Lest anyone wonder whether these high effective marginal tax rates are just an anomaly that, for some curious reason, only impacts one-earner, two-child families on 75% average wage, the point must be made that our high marginal rates are a problem for all family types: single parents, single-earner couples and dual-earner couples. One in three in-work families with dependants are likely to be facing high effective marginal rates. That is 2.5 million families—or 1.6 million couples—of whom 1 million are single earners, 600,000 are dual earners and 900,000 are single parents.

Put simply, any family paying tax and national insurance and receiving tax credits will be looking at an effective marginal tax rate of 73%. Families that, in addition to receiving tax credits, also receive housing benefit and council tax benefit will be looking at a marginal rate of 96%. Under universal credit, the 73% rate will increase slightly to 75%, but the 96% rate will come down to 80%. A 16% drop is significant, but an 80% effective marginal tax rate is still far too high. There is a lot that I would like to say about improvements that I would propose to universal credit, but that is a debate for another day.

Instead of encouraging aspiration, the combined impact of our tax and benefits system suffocates aspiration, trapping families in poverty. That is a burning social injustice that must be addressed. Much of the cause of our high effective marginal tax rates, particularly for single earner couples, is as a result of the introduction of independent taxation in 1990. Since then there has been little or no recognition of family responsibility in the tax system. Not recognising that responsibility in income tax, through a system such as elective joint taxation, has led to a tax arrangement that is anti-aspirational. It is interesting that the former Chancellor, Lord Lawson, wanted to include some kind of joint responsibility in the new system when it was introduced, but it was opposed by the then Prime Minister.

Families in poverty pay thousands of pounds of income tax, but then have to be supported by very inflated benefits, which offset the failure to recognise family responsibility but with the very costly downside of crippling high effective marginal tax rates that suffocate aspiration as the inflated benefits are withdrawn. In 2014 I co-authored a report with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and two other colleagues, "Holding the Centre: Social Stability and Social Capital", which touched on many of the issues we are debating today, although not in such detail on this particular subject. As we noted in the report, many of the Government's—all Governments'—most important goals rely on the contribution of families. However, too often that contribution is under-recognised and the impact of policy on these relationships ignored, under all Governments.

The report pointed out the vital role that family relationships play in our economic prosperity, wellbeing and the life of our children, as well as the cohesion and social stability of our nation, where growth and prosperity are underpinned by fairness, responsibility and community. The stability of marriage and supporting aspirational families are integral parts of the social capital of our country that leads to social stability and economic

[Jeremy Lefroy]

prosperity. A Government who draw on and nurture the wealth of our social capital, supporting families and strengthening relationships, can give people confidence about their future prospects and the ability and opportunity to see aspiration fulfilled.

These issues are vital, and therefore I note with pleasure that the Strengthening Families Manifesto group of Conservative MPs, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton and by Mr David Burrowes, the former Member for Enfield, Southgate, has recently held an inquiry into making work pay for low-income families. The report was published this morning to coincide with this debate. My hon. Friend will outline in greater detail some of the report's specific findings and recommendations. I underline the call in the report for the Chancellor to review formally the effective marginal tax rate for families, assessing the reasons why work does not pay for so many families and evaluating the possible solutions, with a particular focus on the tax system and the recognition of family responsibility.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Despite all the other things going on, this is hugely important. He mentioned a burning injustice—all our ears will have pricked up at that phrase and he is absolutely right. I and other colleagues signed a new clause to the Finance (No. 3) Bill, which was not selected for debate, but does he agree that this does not need an Act of Parliament for the Chancellor to review it, and that the Chancellor can still review it despite the fact that the new clause was not selected or debated and is not part of a formal Act of Parliament?

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why both the debate and that report are so important in showing the Chancellor that this issue is vital for many colleagues across the House.

I will finish with the fact that it is surely very telling that in 1990, just as independent taxation was introduced, far from 73%, the effective marginal tax on a one-earner family with two children on 75% of the average wage was just 34%, close to the average 33% effective marginal tax rate on such families today across the OECD as a whole. We are a total outlier in this respect, and in the wrong direction. If we managed without such aspiration-killing tax rates on working, low-income families in the past, we can and must do so again.

I very much hope that the Minister, for whom I have the highest regard, agrees and will tell us that the Chancellor is willing to review our marginal tax rates, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) mentioned, and bring forward strategies to gradually bring them in line—I realise this is a huge ask—with the OECD average over the years, so that we can become an aspirational economy once again.

9.40 am

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) not only on securing the debate but on the excellent way in which he touched on all the key concerns. We need to address what is surely one of the “burning injustices”

that the Prime Minister referred to on the steps of 10 Downing Street. If there are any just-about-managing people, it is surely those striving to take their families off benefits, go into work and improve their families' lives. We are particularly concerned about families with children.

Yet just as those people aspire to improve themselves, the system knocks and disincentivises them, as we have heard—the opposite of Conservatives encouraging aspiration. Effective marginal tax rates of 70%, 80% or even 90% surely cannot be sustained by a Conservative Government. However, this is not a new issue. We have sustained it. It has been known about for years. It has been eight years since the Conservatives entered Government and we have failed to address the matter.

For many of those years, CARE has held annual meetings about this issue and published annual reports on the taxation of families. I pay tribute to CARE for its assistance in the production of “Making Work Pay for Low-Income Families”, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford says, we are publishing today. It is being published by the Manifesto to Strengthen Families, the executive director of which is our highly respected former colleague, David Burrowes, and can be found on strengtheningfamiliesmanifesto.com.

I will give some examples that detail the complexity and show how low earners can end up paying such high effective marginal tax rates, losing so many of the benefits that they had once they start to earn. We need to change that. This example has been given by the Centre for Policy Studies, so we are not alone in raising this concern.

Imagine Jane, a 28-year-old single mother of one school-aged child. They live in Northampton. She receives benefits of £13,908 a year, comprising three elements: a standard allowance, a child element and a housing element. She starts work, earning £8,143.20 per annum. Her benefits are reduced by 63p for each additional pound she earns, which is the taper relief figure; interestingly, the CPS suggests reducing the universal credit taper rate to 50p as one solution. Jane's effective marginal tax rate at this point is 63%. She then earns a little bit more, becoming liable to pay national insurance, putting her effective marginal tax rate up to 67%. She then earns a little bit more again, earning £12,850 a year—£1,000 over the current personal allowance rate—so is liable to pay income tax. Of that £1,000, she takes home just £251.60. She is being taxed at a 75% effective marginal tax rate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said, if that was the tax rate paid by multimillionaires on their highest earnings, there would be an outcry.

One aim of universal credit, which was intended to be simpler to understand, was to help ease the transition between welfare and work. It is certainly an improvement, but it has not solved the problem of people entering work and losing an average of 73% of their earnings, or even more. We appreciate that the Chancellor promised in his recent Budget to increase the work allowance by £1,000 a year, at a cost of £1.7 billion, which many of us asked for. However, that still leaves us with the problem that we have identified. Working claimants will lose most of the extra money that they earn when they increase their hours or progress in their jobs. It will just mean that they keep a little bit more of their money before they reach that point.

I remind colleagues that the Manifesto to Strengthen Families is supported by more than 60 Conservative parliamentarians; not a small group in our party. Some 20 of us tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) referred to, and it was very much as a result of that amendment not being selected that we called for the debate. However, we had been working on an inquiry into this issue for some time, chaired by David Burrowes. We took evidence from several organisations, including the Child Poverty Action Group, the Resolution Foundation and Tax and the Family, which all indicated in their evidence that they share our concerns on this issue. I will touch on one or two of the reasons why we really need to address it.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, the British effective marginal tax rate of 73% is the highest anywhere in the developed world, where the average is 33%. However, it is not only the very low-paid who are affected. Our inquiry found that families with earnings that appear high can also be affected. For example, a single-income family with three children earning £21,000 and paying rent of £157 a week could this year have a marginal tax rate of, incredibly, 96%. That does not come down to 32% until income reaches £40,776. Where housing costs are greater, that 96% rate could be even higher. I appreciate that something may be done to look at this, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said, but that is not enough.

Mr Gregory Campbell: I commend the hon. Lady for her continuing interest in this issue. Does she agree that its effect on middle or average-income families earning around £22,000 to £26,000 per year causes particular resentment among people in that category? They are the aspiring families who want to earn more and contribute more to society, and they feel that they are being penalised as they do so.

Fiona Bruce: That is absolutely right. We outline in our report several reasons why this needs to be addressed. I will touch on four of them.

First, the hon. Gentleman is right that these arrangements are anti-aspirational. Secondly, we believe that they are illogical. While we as Conservatives celebrate the family—my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford said families are the bedrock of a strong, stable and flourishing society—we tax them as if they are individuals while at the same time operating a benefits system that views them as families.

Thirdly, the current arrangement is anti-choice. The best systems of independent taxation give couples the choice as to whether the two people are taxed independently or jointly. Fourthly, it appears judgmental. Any family in which the second earner is either not in work or earning less than their personal allowance will be hit hard and judged for that arrangement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) gave evidence to our inquiry and commented that we find ourselves in the peculiar situation of saying that we are not very judgmental, but being very judgmental at the same time. We are judgmental about couples who choose for only one spouse to work. The huge impact of that was underlined in evidence to us from the Child Poverty Action Group, which said that it looks like

“having a second earner in the labour market in Britain today is necessary to get oneself out of poverty”.

To some extent, we are telling parents staying at home to look after children or relatives that they are making the wrong choice, yet, as our report says, it is in the long-term interests of Government and society to have stable families in which children are nurtured and cared for to give them the best start in life, and if, in some situations, that means taking time out from work, particularly when children are under five, surely that should be encouraged and accommodated.

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend makes the incredibly important point that this is certainly about children, but is also about carers. The enormous number of unpaid carers in this country do a massive amount for our country and society, but the current system does not help them, either.

Fiona Bruce: That is absolutely right: they do indeed.

We talk about crippling high effective marginal tax rates, but actually it costs money to go out to work. Often, it costs money to clothe oneself for work and to travel to work, and it is more expensive if one has to buy lunch out, so some people will effectively earn nothing when they go to work. That cannot be right. As my hon. Friend has said, what is proposed will help different types of family: single parents, married couples and couples in which one person works or one person provides care for other members of the family. Work is good—we know that—but it costs, and it is outrageous that some of the poorest in our society face some of the highest tax rates. One of the highest priorities of the Conservative Government should be to tackle and solve this burning social injustice.

9.52 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I start by congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on securing this debate and on the way they have introduced the subject. I very much welcome the report by the Strengthening Families Manifesto group that was published today and which we are here to debate.

There is no doubt that families are right at the heart of social justice. It is clearly understood that helping families to stay together and thrive together is not only good for them as families, which is obviously very important and at the heart of the issue, but good for our society as a whole and for our economy. I think it is understood that the ability of Government to help families to stay together may be limited, but the least that we should expect is that the Government do not place barriers in the way of helping and encouraging families to stay together. That is the issue that we are debating today.

We should, through our tax and benefits system, provide every possible opportunity for families to improve their finances through hard work—through taking a job, increasing their income, increasing their hours or taking a pay rise. Sadly, the situation that we have at the moment negates that and actually acts as a disincentive to couples taking on extra work or extra hours, because of the effective marginal tax rate by which they are then penalised. That issue was well presented by the previous

[*Steve Double*]

speakers, so I will not go into the detail of it—it is a well-established problem—but it is clearly there for all to see.

The introduction of universal credit was very welcome and a huge step in the right direction.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I was going to intervene earlier, but I was enjoying the flow of the hon. Gentleman's speech, so I decided to rest in my place. He makes an incredibly important point, and I commend the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and all his colleagues for their sterling work. I do not think that anyone has said that the disincentive that we have heard about this morning is an intentional outcome of the over-simplification of our tax system, but if it is not intentional, we should resolve to solve it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Steve Double: I very much welcome that intervention: the hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. I do not believe for a minute that the Government set out with the intention of ending up in this position, in which families face effective marginal tax rates of 75% or 80%. No one intended that to be the case, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that that is the situation and that, if that was not the intention, surely it is time to look at it and see what steps we can take to reverse and undo it.

As I said, the introduction of universal credit was a huge step in the right direction and very welcome. It is not perfect; it is not without its challenges, but I very much welcome the Government's approach to the roll-out of universal credit—to take their time, learn, and adjust and amend as necessary. Fundamentally, universal credit is the right change to make to our benefits system, and I very much welcome the way the Government are rolling it out.

One purpose of universal credit was to ensure that work paid and to reduce the disincentive for people to take on extra work and lose benefits. I saw that myself, before coming to this place, as an employer. I am thinking of the number of times that I approached my staff to offer extra hours of work and they just said to me, "There's no point, Steve, because I will lose tax credits. There is no point in me working longer and harder to be no better off—all I will be doing is giving the extra money to the taxman." Universal credit has been a big positive step, a step in the right direction, to remove that disincentive, and that is hugely welcome, but we need to recognise that there is still a disincentive in the system. It has been highlighted and now is the time to address it.

I also hugely welcome the Government's policy of increasing the personal allowance. That has taken many of the lowest-paid people in our country out of the tax system—out of paying tax—altogether. That has also been the right thing to do and is very welcome, but as we are saying, it does not undo the situation that we now have. Under the current arrangements, there are those who are paying marginal tax rates of 75% if they are homeowners, and 80% if they are renting, and on universal credit. We cannot expect people to be incentivised to take extra work if they will get to keep only 20p or 25p in the pound for the extra work that they take on.

I therefore very much welcome the report that has been published today. I urge the Government to consider it carefully and look at what can be done to review the current situation. I very much welcome the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford that we need to set as a target bringing the UK in line with the OECD average. It seems crazy for the United Kingdom, which is renowned around the world for the effectiveness and competitiveness of its tax system, to be so out of step with the average for the other developed countries. We should set a target that, in an achievable but relatively short space of time, we will seek to reverse the situation and bring ourselves back in step with the OECD average.

We need to change the mindset that the only way to tackle the problem is through the taper rate for universal credit. That will get us so far, and I am sure that any amendments that can be made in that respect would be welcome, but really we need to bring our tax and benefits systems into line with each other.

Fiona Bruce: It is interesting to note that if the taper rate is altered to 50p, when universal credit recipients start to pay national insurance or income tax, they will still face a 66% effective marginal tax rate.

Steve Double: My hon. Friend makes the point well. Although changes to the taper rate will be welcome, they will go only so far. We need to change this system: in the benefits system, families are treated as families, yet in the tax system, people are treated as individuals. That is where the conflict comes. I would very much support any move to treat families as families in the tax system, by allowing some measure of transferrable tax allowance, which enables families to be seen as a whole rather than as individuals. We have the same situation with child benefit. It seems crazy to me that in the child benefit system taxpayers are treated as individuals rather than as families. That seems to be an anomaly we need to address.

I want to put my weight behind the point that this is not just about children. There are huge benefits that we can gain as a country by helping families to look after their elderly relatives and supporting them in the tax system. If we can do that by making some element of the personal tax allowance transferrable—for example, for a family that chooses that one of the taxpayers will stay at home, rather than work, in order to look after an elderly relative, who otherwise would put pressure on our adult social care system—it would be a huge, positive step. It would be better not only for that elderly person and that family, but for our adult social care system, which, as we all know, is under so much pressure at the moment. One answer to that pressure is to enable families to care for their elderly relatives much more, rather than just handing them over to the state and expecting the state to do it all. The Government would do well to consider that. I think it would make a huge, positive contribution to resolving the challenges we face.

I have huge respect for the Minister. When he entered the Chamber today, I was glad to see that he did not have his notes hanging out the top of his folder. I am sure he has been listening and will take a positive message from this debate back to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury, and tell them that there is

something we can look at here and take positive steps on, which would bring huge benefits to families across the country and to our economy.

10.2 am

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who highlighted something of immense importance: the ability of a family member to be able to care, not only for children, but for elderly relatives and other members of the family who need that support. It is so important that the state and society recognise the importance of carers. We have to enable them to care without being under too much pressure, financial or otherwise.

I welcome this debate, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), on the taxation of low-income families. I am delighted that the strengthening families manifesto has been published today. I believe that the family is the building block of society—the foundation on which society rests. Family is the source of our health, wealth and happiness. That may be contrary to what many people believe about Conservatives. People often see Conservatives as hyper-individualistic—it is all about the individual. However, I believe that the foundations of much Conservative philosophy and Conservative values rest on the importance of the family.

It is vital that the Government recognise in their policies that work pays. I will not go into the details, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) went through so effectively, about the impact that the tax system can have on a low-income family, especially someone earning 75% of the average wage—it can be such a disincentive to work. We ought to be looking at the advantages that having a good job and place of work can give to someone as a role model in the family. If we hinder their ability to take those additional hours and to be at work more, we are effectively denying people the opportunity to gain experience at work. They do not feel there is an incentive to work, so they do not get that experience.

That also sends a message to the employer. Employers want to invest in their workforce, to give more skills to the people in their company or organisation. However, if someone is working relatively few hours, there is less return on that investment. If someone can work more hours, they are more likely to secure training provided by that company. If someone has more experience and training, that individual may be able to get a promotion or a better position at work, or may have the opportunity to change companies and find a different position. That is a huge incentive. It has been mentioned that the current tax system crushes that aspiration. It is so important that we change that for this really important sector of society, to give those people an opportunity to aspire and improve themselves. That attitude and those values will then permeate through the family and the wider community.

The manifesto published today provides a huge opportunity for the Government to change their policy. With their ideas of making work pay and supporting families, the Government are sympathetic to that. I recognise the current economic challenge, with many demands on Government time and money, but given

the return on this investment—the improvement in society—it is worth changing the taper and improving it for those low-income families.

Jeremy Lefroy: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the money. These things do not come without a certain loss of revenue. Does he agree that one area to look at—it is interesting that the Centre for Policy Studies suggests that we look at this—is the higher-rate tax relief on pensions. As Members of Parliament we all declare an interest, because we are all taxed at the higher rate and all have pension contributions. That is given to people who already benefit from the 20% allowance and then there is another 20% on top of that. Although some restrictions have been introduced in recent years, that is an enormous cost to the Exchequer, to the benefit of people earning double or triple the national average wage.

Chris Green: My hon. Friend makes a superb point. It is a significant problem that apparent inconsistencies in the tax system give people who are already doing pretty well a further advantage, yet poorer people not do not receive that advantage. Looking more broadly at society, a few years ago there were riots in London and other cities around the country, and we are currently concerned about rising crime and the people causing those problems. We also have to look at how we can strengthen families, because I think that a certain societal cohesion comes from a strong family. That has so many other impacts across society. We may not immediately see income return, but in a stronger, healthier society the returns will be immense, not only for society, but for the Exchequer.

Fiona Bruce: Before my hon. Friend closes, I want to put on the record my appreciation for what he has done. He was one of the hon. Members who took part in the inquiry, which produced this report. Very modestly, he has not made reference to that, but I thank him for his work.

Chris Green: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that. Behind the scenes in Parliament there is so much good work going on, much of which is cross-party, with different colleagues bringing different perspectives. During these difficult times in Parliament, it would be positive for people to reflect on the important work that goes on behind the scenes, influencing decision makers, much of which is on a cross-party basis.

10.9 am

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate under your chairmanship, Sir David. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for opening it so well, to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who did so much to launch the report that we are considering today, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), who was also part of that important work.

I will start by giving credit where credit is due, because it is always important to do that; it is both the polite and the correct thing to do. I therefore say to the Minister, who is a friend in these matters, that we need to put on the record our huge gratitude and appreciation for the 3.4 million jobs created under the Conservative-led Government since 2010. That is 3.4 million people who

[*Andrew Selous*]

have the security of a monthly pay packet, who can look after their family, put food on the table and clothe their children. It is hugely important that that is recognised.

Consider youth unemployment rates around the world. I understand that in Greece youth unemployment is at 57%, and it is far higher in France and many other parts of the world. Our youth unemployment rate is a fantastic achievement. There has been a British jobs miracle since 2010 and we need to be hugely appreciative of it and not take it for granted. It has taken a lot of hard work and focus to create the environment in which businesses can flourish.

Universal credit has also been good, in getting rid of the pernicious effect of the old 16-hour rule. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) talked about when he was an employer and he gave us the example of employees who did not want to work more than 16 hours a week, as it was not worth their while because they would be so penalised by the 16-hour rule. Universal credit has swept that away. Now, for every extra hour that people work, at least they get something more. Lastly, the increase in the personal allowance has been enormously welcome to the group of people we are talking about.

Many of us—certainly among Government Members, but I think across Parliament—understand the damage that high marginal rates of tax do in discouraging enterprise. Entrepreneurs do not have to set up businesses. It has to be worth their while to do so and if the odds are stacked against them, with regard to the returns they will make, they will not start up businesses. This Government understand that well, and because they do we have created this fantastic environment for businesses, which has created those 3.4 million jobs that I just mentioned. All credit is due to the Government for understanding that.

However, I say to the Minister that businesses do not just exist for their own right and for their own benefit; they exist to benefit society and to benefit their employees. Humans are not resources; they are the point of it all. Businesses are there to benefit their employees, and if we are trapping people in low-paid work, so that they cannot progress in the way that many of us here in Westminster Hall have been able to progress throughout our careers, that should be of acute concern to our friends in the Treasury. I am sure that point is not lost on the Minister.

I reiterate the point that, sadly, the United Kingdom is an outlier in this respect, because the marginal tax rate for a one-earner couple with two children on 75% of the average wage is 73%, which is more than twice the EU average of 22%. No other OECD country treats low-income working families as badly as the United Kingdom does, with regard to effective marginal tax rates and work incentives.

It is really important to put on the record that, notwithstanding all the good work that has been done since 2010, this area is unfinished business. I want the Minister to go back to the Treasury and impress on the Chancellor and his fellow Ministers, who I think have an appetite for this work and do get it, the need to say to officials that more work has to be done in this area, so that everyone can benefit from the fruits of their hard work throughout their working life.

The problem of high effective marginal tax rates does not just affect single earners. It affects a million of them, but we know that there are also 600,000 dual earners who are similarly affected and—really importantly—900,000 single parents as well. So this is a problem for all types of family structure.

We are not calling for the abolition of independent taxation; I do not think that would be the right thing to do. However, I think it would be right to introduce an element of choice, because Government Members certainly believe that choice is a good thing. It gives flexibility, because families have different priorities and different needs at different stages of their lives. As has also been said before, we are in fact extremely judgmental, because the tax system is very prejudicial when only one member of a couple chooses to work and the other member chooses to care for children or frail elderly relatives.

Chris Green: I agree that this sense or understanding of the system being judgmental is a problem. Would it not be far better if the system, rather than judging one way or another way, had a far more neutral position, because that would enable individuals and families to make their own decisions?

Andrew Selous: Yes, I completely agree. I think that it comes back to choice and recognising that families face different challenges at different times of their lives, particularly regarding the needs of children, the frailties of elderly parents and so on. I hope that our social care reforms, which are forthcoming, will go some way towards addressing that situation, but the tax system absolutely has a huge role to play in addressing these important issues, which my hon. Friend quite rightly raises.

Effectively, what we are saying through the tax system is that, despite praising with warm words family members who choose to stay at home if they can make the financial choice to do so—not every family has members who can make that choice, but there are families in which one person makes the sacrifice to stay at home, to be with their children or to look after elderly relatives—we think they are making the wrong choice, because we penalise them for doing so; there is no recognition of what they do.

The Centre for Policy Studies, which was referred to earlier, has made a proposal that we should consider, which is to look at the transfer of unused personal allowances. The Child Poverty Action Group—the report that we are considering today looked across the political spectrum; I have great respect for CPAG—made some suggestions about perhaps increasing child benefit for children under five in lower income families. One way that we might be able to fund that—it is a golden rule with me that if anyone calls for an increase in expenditure, my next question is, “Where is the money coming from?”

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride)
indicated assent.

Andrew Selous: I see that the Treasury Minister is nodding; let me give him a suggestion, as I have made a call on the public purse. At the moment, we give child benefit to families that have an income of £100,000, where both members of a couple are earning £50,000, whereas that stops at £62,000 when there is only one earner in a family. So there is £38,000 worth of income in respect of child benefit to play with.

The Minister will have to go back to the Treasury and get all his super-clever officials to run those figures through the Treasury modelling system, but there will be some money there that could perhaps be better targeted at child benefit or the transfer of unused personal allowances. We are not being prescriptive here; we want Ministers to go back and look carefully, and reflect carefully, on these matters.

In respect of the work that parents do within the home—looking after children, or looking after frail or elderly relatives—last October the Office for National Statistics said that unpaid household work had a value to the British economy of £1.24 trillion. That is a big figure, as the Minister will appreciate, and just some recognition of the good that is done to society by that work—the costs that are not accruing to the public purse because of it—would be welcome. I think that on average that work comes down to a value of £18,932 per person, which is a significant amount.

Fiona Bruce: Are we therefore saying that some recognition by the Government of family in the tax system would go a long way towards changing the culture in our society, whereby we ought to value much more greatly that kind of work within the home, which is unpaid but provides so much benefit to society, economically as well as socially?

Andrew Selous: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an entirely reasonable request, and I will tell her why it is so reasonable: all our main economic competitors across the OECD do exactly what she suggests. It needs to be said a lot more often in this House that, as I said at the start of my contribution, we are an outlier in not doing this. We have taken for granted the fact that we have independent taxation that quite often ignores the second person in a family if they are not earning, which has led to some perverse consequences. I ask the Minister to go back to the Treasury and ask his officials to contact the economic counsellors in British embassies around the OECD to get good data on how other countries do this, whether Finland, France or Germany. Let us look at what those countries do; let us look at how that increases the net take-home pay of lower income families; and let us look at the choices that it gives to those families, and at the overall satisfaction that is derived.

We have been talking about low-income families, and it is important to get on the record that the effects of high effective marginal tax rates can go quite high up the income scale. For example, a single-income family with three children paying rent of £157 a week has a marginal tax rate in 2018-19 of 96%, but that does not come down to 32% until income reaches £40,776. That might sound like a very high income, and for a lot of people it is, but for a person who lives in a high-cost housing area, that income disappears very fast. We need to remember that across large parts of the country, particularly those regions south of Birmingham in which many millions of our fellow citizens live, housing costs are extremely high, and that leaves a much smaller net take-home income for families to pay for all their needs with.

To repeat a point that was made earlier, in 1990 the effective marginal tax rate for a single-earner family on 75% of the average wage with two children in the UK

was 34%. Today in the OECD it is 33%. Today in the UK it is 73%. We have diverged massively from our friends and competitors in the OECD since 1990, and I do not think that is because of some malicious plot in the Treasury; I think it has happened in spite of good policies.

Fiona Bruce: Does my hon. Friend think it is interesting that we also have one of the highest rates of marriage breakdown in the developed world? Is there perhaps some interesting connection to be made there?

Andrew Selous: We need to look at everything we can do to strengthen family life, because we know that strong families—healthy, supportive, committed, mutually respectful couple relationships—are the bedrock of our society. As a Government, we used to talk a lot about reducing the couple penalty; certainly when we were in opposition and preparing for Government, that was a significant objective. We have made some progress towards that, given what we have done through universal credit, but it is still a big issue, as all of us see week after week in our constituency surgeries. We sometimes speak to single mums who are on their own, who are not acknowledging their partner because of the loss of income that would entail. That is not a good state of affairs, because there exists a loving, respectful relationship in which mum and dad want to live together, but they are not doing so because they would be penalised. It is all very well for us to talk about people doing the right thing, but for a lot of our constituents that is not possible if they are hit in the pocket. That message needs to hit home.

I will conclude by coming back to the importance of family, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton has quite rightly pressed me on. I know that I am pushing at an open door, because I rechecked the excellent speech that the Chancellor made in Birmingham in October. When he listed the principles that inspire him as a politician, strong families and family stability were right up there. I think the Chancellor gets this—I think the whole Treasury team gets this—so I hope that when the Minister responds he will give us a commitment that he will go back to the Treasury, talk to the Chancellor, and do detailed preparatory work and study of other countries to look at how we can make some of these changes. We are not asking the Minister to come up with specific answers today, as we know there is a lot of detailed work to be done, but I hope he will give us an undertaking that he will go back to the Treasury and make sure this work gets underway.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): I had wanted to call the Front Benchers by 10.25, but I will call Sir John Hayes for a tiny contribution.

10.25 am

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am grateful for your indulgence, Sir David, and apologise for not having been here at the beginning of the debate. I am proud to be associated with this study, and I have only two points to make. First, change is inevitable and constant, as Disraeli said, but not all change is for the better. In my lifetime, many things have changed for the better, but many have deteriorated, and perhaps the sharpest and most obvious deterioration

[Sir John Hayes]

has been the change in family life and the consequent alteration in communities. When I was brought up in a working-class community by working-class parents, that community was stable, law abiding and socially cohesive. It embedded in me strong values: to do the right thing, work hard, abide by the law, and care for other people.

If someone were to go to that council estate now, they would see a very different picture. They would see more lawlessness and more vandalism. They would see the parade of shops that was once there, which my mother used, long gone. Fundamentally and most starkly, they would see widespread family breakdown, and the wider effect of family breakdown is something that the Government need to recognise and use every lever at their disposal to do something about. It is no use politicians claiming that things will always and only get better, because they do not: society has changed for both good and ill simultaneously, and no Government of any party have dealt with this issue to the degree that they should have done.

We can use the tax system in exactly the way this report suggests, so my second point—mindful of your advice, Sir David, I will make only two—is that family, and particularly marriage, need to be supported in the tax system. The benefits system does so to some degree: as we have heard from various speakers, it recognises family responsibility. However, that is not matched by the tax system to the degree that it should be. I say to the Minister, who is my close friend and my right hon. Friend—which is quite a different matter—that he would stand proud among Treasury Ministers of this age and of all ages if he used the tax system to recognise family responsibility more effectively. With that brief contribution—some will say all too brief, Sir David, but I know you will not—I conclude my remarks.

10.28 am

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. I must say that as a feminist, I feel as though I have fallen down some kind of vortex to the 1948 film “Every Girl Should Be Married” in this debate. I fundamentally disagree with many of the arguments that hon. Members have put forward so well; I respect their right to do so, but they have ignored the elephant in the room, which is that lots of the stresses and strains on our society are caused by austerity, not by whether people are married or not. That is a personal choice.

Tax is often thought of as a boring, dreaded thing—a duty to be avoided, something best left to stuffy men in suits. However, like all economic tools, tax is a mechanism that opens up opportunities to shape the kind of society we want to live in. It incentivises good behaviour and punishes what some would consider to be bad behaviour. The UK Government’s tax system remains quite a blunt tool with which to tackle income inequality. It is riddled with loopholes that benefit the wealthy, and according to figures from the Institute for Public Policy Research, the UK is the fifth most unequal country in Europe when it comes to income.

The tax system is very gendered. In its analysis of last year’s Budget, the Women’s Budget Group said that raising the income tax threshold is not a policy that

helps women. It argues that 70% of those taken out of the higher rate of tax, and 73% of higher rate taxpayers who will benefit from raising the higher rate threshold, are men. We cannot claim that this will benefit women in any particular way, especially those in low-income jobs. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, minimum household budgets have risen by about a third since 2008 for most types of household. Inflation is sky high, wages are being squeezed and a no-deal Brexit would see an additional 6.4% of lower incomes being spent on food. That is a penalty that most families cannot afford.

I mention families, because they are central to what many Members have talked about. The hon. Members for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) and others have mentioned universal credit and the impact of the 16-hour rule. Figures from the Church of England show that a single mum with three kids, who is working 16 hours, would have to work 45 hours to make up for the cuts that the Conservative Government have made to the benefits system. What impact would a single mum working 45 hours have on family life? When is she actually going to see her kids? Who is going to tuck them into bed at night? That is not going to happen.

I have been working on a campaign for the removal of the two-child limit in the universal credit system, for which I would welcome hon. Members’ support, if they wish to give it. There was some movement from the Secretary of State last week, but it will still be in place for children born after 6 April 2017. The disincentive within the system is rife. Someone with two children who wants to get remarried, into another family, will lose out, because that will cause a change to benefits. If that person, once they have remarried, wants to have a child in that new family, they will not get the child element of universal credit, which is nearly £3,000. If any Government Member wants to speak to their colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions and get them to get rid of this policy, that would be welcome, because it is a disincentive. If a family has four children, there is actually an incentive under this policy to separate and become two families with two children each, rather than one family with four children, thereby saving a huge amount of money. That needs to be removed from the universal credit system. If hon. Members are serious about it, they need to ask their colleagues in the DWP to do that.

Nobody mentioned the impact of the immigration system on families. I get many people coming to my surgeries who, because of the minimum income threshold in the immigration system, cannot bring a spouse to live here. I met a chap who is working two jobs at the moment, but cannot meet the threshold to bring his wife and his child over from another country. That is separating families. The number of Skype families out there, who are not being well served by this Government, who claim to support families, is an absolute scandal and we should do something about it. The stress of living in poverty probably contributes more to the break-up of families than anything else.

The report by Philip Alston, the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, which Conservative Members never want to mention, says:

“Families with two parents working full time at the national minimum wage”—

that is the Chancellor's pretendy living wage, because it is not a living wage that anyone can live on—

“are still 11% short”—

11% short—

“of the income needed to raise a child.”

Andrew Selous: There is no disagreement on these Benches that poverty leads to family breakdown, but in the impact assessment for the Child Poverty Act 2010, brought in by the last Labour Government, there was also a recognition that family breakdown leads to poverty. Does the hon. Lady accept that it is circular and that the one leads to the other, both ways?

Alison Thewliss: I would accept the hon. Gentleman's arguments far more if he would argue for an end to austerity, for an increase to low wages and for the minimum wage to be equalised. At the moment the thresholds for 16 and 17-year-olds and for 18 to 21-year-olds are very different. The gap between the lowest paid—those on the UK's pretendy living wage—and the people at the top of the age threshold is increasing. It has got wider over the last three Budgets because increases at the top of the scale have not been met with increases at the bottom of the scale. It should be a fair wage for everybody. A 21-year-old parent does not get enough income in to support a family, and that will bring additional pressures to bear on what they can bring in and provide. People who have spoken today have entirely missed the point.

Treating families as a unit within the tax system, as often happens with universal credit, has been widely criticised by women's organisations because it removes women's agency. It also removes women's ability to provide for their families. Under the universal credit system, a woman is disincentivised from leaving a relationship, because all the money goes to the man—the main earner in the household. I appreciate that the Secretary of State has said that she is looking at this issue, but it creates a risk. That also exists within the rape clause of the two-child policy, where the only way a woman can claim this vile clause is to leave the relationship. Women's organisations across the board say that the most dangerous time for a woman is when she leaves a relationship; that is when she is most likely to be murdered. There is serious stuff about women's place in this policy.

I was glad to hear that the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire is not calling for the abolition of independent taxation. I am relieved about that. Individuals should be able to exist within the system by themselves, for a very serious reason, which leads on from my point about universal credit. Incentivising marriage is disincentivising separation. There may be very reasonable grounds for separation, particularly in cases of domestic abuse. The marriage allowance, which benefits the higher earner in a family—almost always the man, as I have laid out—exacerbates inequality. To take this to its logical conclusion, if a man assaults his partner, so she cannot go to work, or he prevents her from working through coercive control and financial control, which we know a lot more about and which the Government have said they want to tackle in the Domestic Abuse Bill, he effectively gets a tax break for doing so. That is why this should have no place in the taxation system. It is important that women have agency and are able to get

money in. When money is taken away from women, that agency is removed, as well as their ability to look after themselves.

I had many more things I wanted to say about this policy. I had a whole speech written out about other things. We need to recognise that indirect taxation is also a huge issue. VAT disproportionately affects low-income families. According to the latest figures, those at the bottom end of the income distribution now pay nearly one third of their income in indirect taxes. The poorest fifth pay 31% in taxes such as VAT, alcohol and fuel duties, which is much higher than the 13% paid by the richest households. As I have been sitting here, I understand that the European Parliament has finally agreed to abolish the tampon tax. That is something that the UK Government have now delayed for almost four years. I hope that, now that the Minister has the green light that apparently the UK Government were waiting for, that tax on women will go as soon as possible.

While we can talk about taxes and marriage, the real elephant in the room is austerity and the cuts that have been made to women's budgets. Women need to have agency; that is the most important thing for families across the UK.

10.38 am

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the chair, Sir David. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments and I thank the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), the hon. Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), Bolton West (Chris Green) and for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), and the spokesperson for the Scottish National Party, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), for their contributions.

It is a pleasure to have been invited to the launch of a manifesto to strengthen family policies for a Conservative Government. I was not going to make comments about that, because I did not realise it was on the agenda today, but I will do so now, if I may, Sir David, with your indulgence. There were eight asks in the document, and I have time to comment on about four, which are all linked to the debate.

There is a reference to having a Minister for families. We had a Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, which David Cameron got rid of, so that idea of co-ordination went out of the window in 2010. I am pleased that Conservative Members now think that that was a good idea. Perhaps if they had kept that Secretary of State eight years ago, we might not be in the difficult position that we are in in relation to families.

The document refers to family hubs and how wonderful they are, and to children's centres, but hundreds of children's centres have been closed in the past eight years under austerity. It is all right to refer to family hubs and children's centres, but they have gone by the dozen, week in, week out.

Fiona Bruce: May I clarify the distinction between family hubs and children's centres? Regarding family hubs, we are saying that we need to give holistic support to families as they bring up their children right through their childhood—not just from nought to five, but from nought to 19 and beyond.

[*Fiona Bruce*]

Family hubs are designed to support not only people bringing up children but, as we have heard, people caring for elderly relatives and couples resolving difficulties in their marriage. It is a one-stop shop where families can go to get help for anything that they have difficulty with, from statutory agencies or from charities working together, much as people go to a citizens advice bureau in a wholly non-judgmental way. I am delighted that family hubs are springing up all over the country. Next month, there will be a major launch here in Westminster where Westminster City Council will promote family hubs.

Peter Dowd: The hon. Lady reinforces my point. To set up a family hub via charities or local authorities is fantastic—no one disputes the policy—but that has to be set in the context of austerity, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central said.

My local authority has had a 50% cut in its funding, resulting in the potential closure of children's centres, some nurseries and day centres. It is okay to talk about having a family hub or a children's centre, but the resource is not there, because the Government have decided they will redirect their resources elsewhere. That is fine, but I am afraid that it is impossible to have both. A political choice has to be made, and has been made. The political choice that the Government have made is, *de facto*, to outsource the closing-down of many of those centres, fantastic community facilities and charities through cuts to local authorities.

The document talks about supporting mental health services, which face major cuts as a result of austerity. The Government have talked about parity of esteem time after time, but they have not done a great deal about it. They have come to that issue as a Johnny-come-lately.

Fiona Bruce: Again, our report talks about mental health challenges. Those of us who support strengthening families believe that we need to strengthen families so we can help many children who, at an early stage of their life, could and do suffer mental health challenges because of relational difficulties in the family.

I am the patron of a children's mental health charity in my constituency, and not long ago, I asked the former chief executive, who has now moved on, how many of the children that the charity is counselling, who can be as young as four years old, have mental health difficulties at least in part because of relational difficulties in their home environment. He looked at me and said, "Fiona, virtually all of them." A key purpose of our manifesto is tackling the root cause of many young people's mental health problems.

Peter Dowd: I am pleased that the hon. Lady made that intervention; she is reinforcing every point that I make as I go along. Again, the Government have decided to cut early intervention services year in, year out—I can say that because I worked in that area for many years. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we have to start early, but if services for early intervention are cut and there is a lack of funding, the impact is the £48 billion from family dislocation that the report identifies.

Fiona Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Dowd: No, because I have not got much time and I have given way several times. I have other points to make.

The manifesto is linked to the issue of taxation of families, but it is not just the fiscal issue that we have to identify—that is the problem; it is the wider determinants that go way beyond issues of taxation. The hon. Member for Stafford referred to the Christian background. I think it is in Matthew that Christ says,

"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's".

Effectively, he was saying, "Pay your taxes." He is a fantastic role model for people who avoid paying their taxes. The bottom line is that a society can be cohesive only if everybody plays their part in it, whether through paying their taxes, charitable interventions or political inventions of the sort we make every day. That is what we have to do.

In the report, the hon. Member for Congleton talks about fathers being registered on birth certificates. That is fine, but an Office for National Statistics report on registration identified the fact that the vast majority of fathers are registered on birth certificates and that of those who are not, something like two thirds or a third are identified as being very much involved with the family. The idea that the registration of a father on a birth certificate will somehow solve some sort of problem is—I will not say laughable—only one element of the totality.

Andrew Selous: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Dowd: I will, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I do not have much time.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Interventions should be short.

Andrew Selous: It will be, Sir David. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) was making was that if registrations take place in family centres, the fathers become more involved in what the family centre can provide.

Briefly, in the impact assessment of the Child Poverty Act 2010, which was introduced by the hon. Gentleman's party when it was in government, there was a recognition that, although poverty leads to family breakdown, family breakdown also leads to poverty. Is that still the Labour party's position?

Peter Dowd: We would reintroduce the targets that we set in relation to child poverty, which the hon. Gentleman's Government got rid of. That is what is frustrating—Conservative Members are coming to us with all these ideas that the Labour party had for many years and which the Conservative party got rid of when it came to power. The Government got rid of all the things that hon. Members have been talking about and introduced austerity. They said, "Austerity is here. We're all going to play our part. We're all in the boat together," but in reality, we are not.

Although I recognise many of the worthy points made by hon. Members, that worthiness has got to be put in place, not by mechanisms, but by everybody playing their part in society and paying their taxes, and by corporations not getting tax breaks or being able to

avoid this, that and the other. The point that the hon. Member for Stafford makes about tax reliefs is fair; I will potentially look at them.

There is a complicated pattern, and on that basis, although I understand some of the points that the hon. Members for Congleton and for Stafford have made, I would say that actions speak louder than words. We need more action and fewer words.

10.49 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for securing this debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for her insightful contribution. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) for his involvement in the important report issued this morning. I can assure all present that it will be carefully digested by Ministers in the Treasury.

At the heart of the matter lies the issue of fairness in the taxation system and the way in which the benefits system operates in our country. Also at the heart lies the central point that many speakers have made this morning as to whether the tax and benefits system appropriately incentivises aspiration—a Conservative ideal—and effectively incentivises employment, including incentivising people to go out and get jobs. And of course there is the impact of all those matters on the crux of the issue, which is the social impact of these measures on the stability of the family unit. I, the Treasury and the Government more broadly certainly recognise that all those points are of critical importance. I am particularly proud that Conservative Members chose to secure this debate and were instrumental in producing such a thoughtful and detailed report. It is the Conservative party that believes most strongly and passionately in the issues that lie at the centre of the matters we are debating today.

Having accepted that the matters are important, I also accept the many examples given in the debate today on the way in which the system does not work effectively. The most important has been the very high level of marginal tax rates. Several examples were chosen of particular circumstances involving individuals and children and the make-up of families to illustrate that we can, under certain circumstances, have marginal tax rates as high as 73% or even beyond. I accept that that is deeply undesirable. That is not the same thing as suggesting that the entire system is broken. If we chose different examples we might get far lower marginal tax rates than those that have been rightly highlighted in the report and in the debate today. Indeed, the OECD has indicated that across the universe of low-income families in this country, we are above average when it comes to making sure that net income is received by those families. However, there will always be more to do, which is why this debate is important.

We should not overlook the fact that we have a very progressive tax system. Some 28% of all income tax is paid by the top 1% of earners. In the previous Budget, we met our manifesto commitment to increase the personal allowance to £12,500 one year early. It will come in next year and take millions of the lowest paid out of tax altogether. In case it is felt that only the lower

paid face very large rates of marginal income tax, we must bear in mind that, under the current system, once someone earns beyond the large amount of £100,000, the personal allowance is tapered away at a rate of £1 for every £2 earned. At that point in the income distribution, wealthy people pay a marginal rate if we include national insurance of 63%. A necessarily complicated tax system, because it tries to do many things at the same time, throws up all sorts of deeply unsatisfactory anomalies. The complexities of the tax system and the interaction with the benefits system means a complicated challenge ahead.

Low tax matters. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) put it eloquently. Low taxes matter for reasons other than fairness. They drive the economy, jobs and entrepreneurship. They make sure that we have, for example, halved the level of youth unemployment since 2010. He cited the very good example of Greece and other countries where they have taken a different way and have paid the consequences. The Government remain committed to lower taxes and to simplifying them to the extent possible and to making sure that the anomalies raised today are addressed.

On the benefits system, much has been said about universal credit. We all recognise that when the Labour party was in government, its benefits system was overly complicated. People had to go to the DWP, to the local housing authority and to HMRC to qualify for a variety of benefits, but we have simplified that to one benefit. When it comes to making work pay, which lies at the heart of many of the arguments, universal credit does exactly that. People no longer have the 16-hours-of-work cliff edge, beyond which they lose all their entitlement.

Alison Thewliss: Will the Minister give way?

Mel Stride: Extremely briefly.

Alison Thewliss: Does the Minister accept the research by the Church of England that a single mum with three kids will have to work 45 hours to make up for his cuts?

Mel Stride: The point I was coming on to was the taper. In 2016, we announced a reduction in the taper rate from 65% to 63%. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton called for it to be reduced further to 50%. That is a deeply desirable move if it can be achieved, but we must recognise the cost of doing so. The cost of having gone from 65% to 63% is £1.8 billion across the scorecard period. I do not have the figure to hand, but it would be absolutely enormous if we went to 50%. With great respect to Members, even the examples of where we could do more, such as tax relief on higher-rate pensions or the changes to child benefit and the way in which that might operate, would be dwarfed by any such move. We have to recognise, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire explicitly did, the costs of making the changes that have been proposed.

The Conservative party introduced the national living wage. We should be enormously proud of that fact. It goes up by 4.9% in April, so those in full-time employment will take home £2,750 more than they did in 2010¹. The marriage allowance is an example of exactly what the report calls for. Among the measures are a transferability of allowance to make provision for those who stay at home to look after children or elderly relatives. It transfers

1.[Official Report, 31 January 2019, Vol. 653, c. 6MC.]

[*Mel Stride*]

at a rate of 10%, provided the person is not a higher or additional-rate taxpayer. Once again, it is focused on the lowest paid in our society. We spent time reflecting on child support. We will spend £6 billion more per year by 2020, and we brought in tax-free childcare. If someone is on universal credit, they are able to claim back up to 85% of the cost of childcare.

In the remaining couple of minutes, I will respond directly to the overarching request made of me this morning, which is that I go back to the Treasury with the report and the comments made in this debate and look genuinely and deeply at the issues raised. I can give an unequivocal commitment to do precisely that because, despite what is going on in the House at the moment and the important vote tonight, certain things must continue uninterrupted. Our essential quest for social justice and the Conservative party's commitment to the family and a society that is at ease and at one with itself, must not be diminished. The House has my commitment to do exactly as I have said. I will engage in the form that my hon. and right hon. Friends wish me to make sure that we push forward on the important issues raised today.

10.58 am

Jeremy Lefroy: I thank all Members for their contributions today. Extremely important points have been made. I thank the Minister for his commitment to look at this area, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for driving this forward, together with other colleagues here today. I also thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) who made important points. I do not agree with all of them, but two need looking at, including the two-child limit, about which I have concerns. I am really pleased about the announcement made this week, but we need to go further. Secondly, I entirely agree with her on bringing families together. I have experience of that in my own constituency.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), who speaks for the Opposition. The Labour party did some extremely important things. Some were reversed, some maintained, and some I would like to see brought back. We need to go further. He is absolutely right: there is no monopoly of virtue or vice in this area in any party. We all have to work on this for the benefit of our constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the taxation of low-income families.

Sitting adjourned.

Department for Work and Pensions: Members' Representations

11 am

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered representations by Members of Parliament to the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of constituents.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am grateful to have been allocated this debate. I wish to raise the serious and worsening effects that the practices and policies of the Department for Work and Pensions are having on those needing welfare support, and the ability of the advice sector and staff, including those in my office, to support claimants. I could raise numerous points, but I will focus on universal credit. I must praise the work of MPs, third-sector groups and the Work and Pensions Committee in exposing the unfolding catastrophe of universal credit, and repeatedly forcing the Government to rethink their approach. Universal credit's three main objectives are to reduce poverty, to make work pay and to simplify benefits.

Why do I need to raise the serious and worsening effects of DWP practices and policies? Let us be clear: the challenges that our constituents face are immense. Since being elected, I have witnessed at first hand a Government Department that has been increasingly uncompromising and punishing of claimants. That has been ever so evident in the woeful implementation of universal credit and its callous roll-out.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this significant debate. Does she agree that the five-week delay in universal credit is supporting people to get into debt rather than out of it, and that the Government should rethink how that is affecting the lives of real people?

Kate Osamor: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, which I will come to later. I thank her for her contribution.

There is considerable anxiety among the 16,630 households in Edmonton accessing at least one kind of social support that will be replaced by universal credit. By August 2018, around 2,750 households in Edmonton had been moved to the new system. Many of my constituents have reported multiple significant problems in dealing with universal credit, from understanding the new system, to the transition to universal credit, the excruciating application process, receiving payments, which are mainly late, and the ongoing support—in short, the entire system.

My constituents are not alone in their assessment of universal credit. The National Audit Office said that the universal credit programme was

“driven by an ambitious timescale”

and had

“suffered from weak management, ineffective control and poor governance.”

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, difficulties with claiming universal credit mean that currently one in five applications fails.

A vulnerable constituent of mine made a claim for universal credit in July 2018. It was initially incorrectly refused, even though he had provided all the necessary documentation. Only after challenging the decision was his application accepted in September 2018. Despite the appeal being upheld, he did not receive any universal credit payments until December 2018—almost five months after his initial claim. Let that sink in: it was five months after the initial claim, and he was an extremely vulnerable person.

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the bureaucracy facing claimants, including appeals, is too much to bear for people going through such difficulties, and that our constituency staff teams are constantly asked for help that they are unable to give?

Kate Osamor: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I will come on to the demand for the legal representation that vulnerable people need.

As I said, my constituent, who was a very vulnerable person, received his first payment five months after his initial claim, and that was only after the relentless persistence of my office. I cannot convey the hardship that my constituent went through in those five months. He was let down by a shoddy assessment of his application.

In areas such as Edmonton, with such high levels of inequality, the suffering has been more intense and more widespread. My role is to fight for equality for all. Achieving equality is not just the right thing to do; the evidence is clear that more equal societies are better, healthier and safer. Such societies have fewer health issues and social problems, are less internally divided, and are better able to sustain economic growth.

On 11 January this year, three single mums defeated the DWP at the High Court over issues with universal credit. They were missing out on hundreds of pounds a year because of the farcical way the DWP calculates income. Lord Justice Singh and Mr Justice Lewis ruled that the DWP had been wrongly interpreting the universal credit regulations. In their judgment, they described the universal credit income assessment process as “odd in the extreme”. Can the Minister confirm whether the Secretary of State will appeal that High Court judgment?

Universal credit is complicit in the Government's punishing austerity policy, which has increased child poverty to 4 million and rising. The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts a 7% rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2022. Some sources predict that, if policies remain the same, child poverty rates will reach as high as 40%. In a recent report, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, expressed his dismay that one fifth of the UK population—14 million people—were living in poverty, 1.5 million of whom are destitute and unable to afford basic essentials. His report described the immense growth in food banks and the queues outside them, people sleeping rough on the streets, and the growth of homelessness. It is utterly unacceptable that in 2019 millions of people live without food security.

By continuing the roll-out of universal credit, the Government are making it clear that the human cost of austerity is not a priority for them. In recent days, DWP Ministers have been talking of extra funding for universal credit—£1.5 billion to help people by allowing advances

of up to 100% on day one, if individuals require it. Let us be clear: that is not extra money in the pocket of those barely getting by; it is debt, pure and simple. The gap between legacy and universal credit payments means that claimants who take up advances start their claims in debt to the DWP. Advances only complicate the process and should not be necessary in the first place.

To make matters worse, the Citizens Advice reported that claimants on universal credit were more likely to have debt problems than those on the legacy system. However, DWP Ministers seem to think that saddling claimants with debt from the start of their claim is a solution to the problem of poor design. The Government pledged an extra £4.5 billion for universal credit across the next five years in the last Budget. However, the benefits freeze is set to continue until April 2020, and there is no guarantee that it will not continue after that, no matter what soundbites emerge from the Secretary of State. The IFS has also made it clear that there are welfare cuts still to come of more than £4 billion per year until 2022-23, which spells more and more insecurity for those who can least withstand it. The Government continue to flatter themselves about ending austerity, but unless they restore humanity into the welfare system, I can only determine that it is a soundbite exercise.

In Edmonton, we are seeing the continued grinding down of local support services and the continuing impoverishment of the constituents who I was sent here as a Member of Parliament to represent and serve. Serving their interests and seeking to aid them is my primary goal, but the scale of issues with accessing universal credit means that Members' offices are overwhelmed with pleas for help. I have seen an increase in the volume of cases, a large proportion of which are complex and need legal and specialist representation that is harder and harder to find. As a consequence of the DWP's policies and approach, and in the context of austerity, I—like other MPs—am approaching the point when it will be untenable to make adequate representations on behalf of my constituents.

A key obstacle that my constituents face in accessing universal credit is the overemphasis that the system places on digitisation. According to Neil Couling of the DWP, the system relies heavily on digitisation to process claims and, as a result, less than 1% of claimants lose out. I find that hard to believe, because the reality of digital skills in the UK paints a very different picture. According to the Office for National Statistics, one UK adult in 10 has never used the internet, one in five lacks basic digital skills and 20% of disabled adults have never used the internet. Even a DWP survey reported that 30% of UC recipients found the online process either “very difficult” or “fairly difficult”, while 43% said that they needed more support with setting up their claim. Ipsos MORI's 2018 UK consumer digital index agreed with DWP findings that an estimated 1.2 million benefit claimants have low digital capability or no digital capability. At times, my staff have had to set up email accounts and give basic IT training to my constituents.

In short, the design of universal credit is fundamentally flawed. It systematically disadvantages or excludes the millions of people in the UK without good digital skills. The over-reliance on digitisation has meant more and more people coming to my office because of issues that they face with universal credit or that originate in problems with universal credit. Given that 30% of universal

[*Kate Osamor*]

credit recipients found the online process either “very difficult” or “fairly difficult”, and 43% said that they needed more support with setting up their claim, will the Minister accept that it is time to stop and rethink the over-reliance on the digital process?

Without a doubt, the benefits process is complex for anyone. Consequently, the DWP has helplines available under the legacy system to enable claimants and advice staff to uncover problems and find a solution. However, no such comparable arrangement is in place for universal credit. A working single mother in my constituency faced considerable issues when dealing with universal credit. A mother of three dependent children, she was wrongly advised by her work coach to end her claim for tax credit and claim universal credit instead. Unfortunately, the work coach had not grasped that universal credit was not available to claimants in Enfield with three or more children until 2019. As a result, my constituent's claim was terminated. Although she had taken steps to apply separately for tax credit, her claim could not be processed because she was deemed to fall within the reclaim period for universal credit. Having just started a new job, she was reliant on benefit income to tide her and her children over until her wage arrived, but she was left with nothing.

She tried to deal directly with the DWP but had no success. She came to my office, but my caseworkers, too, were frustrated in their efforts to solve the problem. DWP staff incorrectly informed us that all third-party enquiries, including representations from MPs, would need to be made via an online portal, which could take more than a month to process, irrespective of the urgency of the representations. It was only after my office escalated the matter to the Secretary of State and to senior personnel on multiple occasions that matters were eventually resolved.

Universal credit left my constituent and her children in poverty. That could have been avoided if there had been key escalation points in place that she or my office could have used throughout the process. When problems emerge, the structures to remedy them are not fit for purpose. For what has proved to be a difficult system, why not introduce an escalation process such as a well-staffed helpline for claimants, Members' offices and the wider sector? Will the Minister commit to making such changes to the system?

At the moment, the soundbite of the DWP's approach is to “learn and adapt.” That is the height of privileged detachment. Can the Department really be serious? What are spoken of as problems to be solved as they come up are real people's lives. What is perceived as a learning opportunity for Ministers is devastation for my constituents. I ask the Minister not to turn a blind eye to these problems, but to look back at universal credit's three main objectives: to reduce poverty, to make work pay and to simplify benefits. Rather than ploughing ahead, is it not time for the Department to overhaul the system?

Universal credit in its current form simply is not working; it is causing greater poverty, destitution and anxiety wherever it is rolled out. The Government need to commit to a root-and-branch review of universal credit. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I pay genuine tribute to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor); although obviously I do not agree with all the points she made, it is clear from her time as an MP and formerly as a councillor, and from the issues she raised in her speech, that she is a passionate campaigner on the subject, particularly for vulnerable claimants in her constituency. I am not the Minister ultimately responsible for universal credit, which was the predominant focus of her speech, but part of my portfolio is to represent vulnerable claimants who go through the universal credit process, so I recognise some of the issues that she pointed up.

I will talk about some of the specific asks that have been addressed and on which there is much agreement, but first it is fair to remind hon. Members that there was cross-party support for the principle of universal credit: to offer personalised, tailored support. Stakeholders broadly support that principle. That does not mean that all is right, but we must not forget that legacy benefits were not the panacea of a utopian state in which everything was great. They were incredibly complicated, with six different benefits and three different agencies, and with the involvement of the DWP, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and local authorities. Frankly, anyone navigating them had to be a nuclear physicist, whether they were claimants, MPs or MPs' staff members trying to support predominantly vulnerable claimants.

The figures bear out that point. We typically saw 700,000 claimants a year missing out on £2.4 billion of benefit support—about £280 each per month—that we had all voted to give them because we recognised that it was the right thing to do for those predominantly vulnerable claimants. There was a 90% tax rate for some claimants, and there were well-known problems with the cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours. In our casework, we saw people who wanted to do the right thing and were trying to improve their opportunities in life, but the system was working against them. Universal credit was therefore introduced, as I said, broadly with cross-party support. It is right that we have looked at it all the way through as a test-and-learn, and that is why it is important that the hon. Member for Edmonton has raised her direct experiences and those of her office.

We have already made some significant improvements. We, rightly, made the changes to advance payments. Those payments were always there, but people had to know to ask and, unsurprisingly, very few people did. They are now, rightly, automatically part of the initial interview with the work coach and, unsurprisingly, the take-up rates of advance payments have significantly improved.

Initially, those payments were repaid over six months. That was, rightly, changed to 12 months, and then to 16 months. The repayment rate has also been reduced and we have strengthened the discretion to take into account particular hardships, to make sure we are not compounding a problem.

Those who are transferring over from legacy benefits, such as housing benefit, will get an additional two weeks-worth of housing benefit money, with no strings attached. That is additional money. As the regulations

come forward, there will also be an additional two weeks for those on employment and support allowance, jobseeker's allowance or income support, again with no strings attached. That is typically worth £237 on housing benefit and £200 on ESA, JSA or IS. Opposition Members often seek to oppose what the Government do, but this is something they should support.

We have scrapped the seven-day waiting period and strengthened the alternative payment arrangements, on housing costs direct to the landlord, for example. If a legacy claimant already had that provision, there will now be a presumption that we should have the conversation to see if that was the right arrangement. We have also looked at the frequency of payments, for those who have been used to a more frequent payment and might struggle with monthly payments.

There is the extra work allowance. We have made changes to the exemptions for the minimum income floor for self-employed claimants, and there are additional protections for those on severe disability premiums. But there is still more to do.

Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab): The advance payments are still a loan, which is a crucial point that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) made. My question is this, however: those people who are being managed through their migration to universal credit will have protections, but those people who have naturally migrated—often, but not always, through change of circumstances—will not have those protections. What is the justification for that? Many of my constituents are worse off.

Justin Tomlinson: As the hon. Lady said, that is to do with change of circumstances. The transitional arrangements were put in place for those who were transferring as part of natural migration, and we have, rightly, confirmed that that number will be ring-fenced to just 10,000 this year, so we can have a real deep dive to look at the levels of support that are needed. I will come back to that in a moment.

On the wider point about why transitional arrangements were not put in, that is because it was recognised that there would be a change of circumstances. We are seeing that a lot of people benefit, and some go the other way, but overall we are now spending an additional £2 billion on the current benefits compared with the legacy benefits, before the extra money goes in. That is more money going to the people who need that help.

Let me turn to points where I think there is agreement. We talk about office casework. We all have busy offices and have to prioritise casework and supporting our constituencies. I am very proud to have been rated third out of 650 on theyworkforyou.com on helping constituents. I absolutely understand the importance of casework. One of my staff specialises in this area, has visited the jobcentre with me and talked to the partnership manager. We all have a partnership manager, who is the point of contact for escalating cases.

I know the hon. Member for Edmonton was due to visit the jobcentre in December 2017, and that that visit was cancelled. I encourage her and her staff to take part in such a visit. It is really important, and they are there to help. Where we have specific cases that do not seem

right, there is an ability to escalate; MPs can talk to the senior people in the respective jobcentres and they can help take that forward.

I have a lot of sympathy with the point about digital by default. The principle was to mirror the world of work, because most workplaces now expect staff to have a reasonable level of digital engagement. However, that is not the case for all people. Not all people on universal credit will end up in work—even if that is their ultimate aim, not everybody is going to, and not everybody will do that overnight. We need to improve communication in order to advise about alternatives; claimants can access support via the telephone, face to face, or through home visits. We need to do better at promoting that and it is certainly something that I will continue to push on.

We also need to look at the issue of consent. One of the complications of the General Data Protection Regulation is that we now need implicit consent. I regularly meet stakeholders, particularly housing associations and local authorities, who say, “We represent many of your vulnerable claimants, and we want to help. We have the resource to help, and we have teams, but unless we know that one of the people that we are working with is about to be migrated or has come on to universal credit or is accessing an advance payment, how can we help?” We have got to find a way, and I think that should be done in the same way as with advance payments—through making asking for implicit consent an automatic part of the initial interview, in order to get those support organisations working with claimants. There is a resource there that wants to support claimants and we should be doing everything we can to match them up.

We made a significant announcement on putting citizens' advice into every single jobcentre throughout the country. It will be an independent organisation, and we will cover the costs. That will start in April, and I welcome it. As part of the test-and-learn with the 10,000, I want to look closely at exactly how much time is available to vulnerable claimants. Is it enough or are there other things that could be done? I think we should look very carefully at that.

Janet Daby: Advance payments still take five days. Does the Minister agree that that is just too long? What are people expected to do during that period?

Justin Tomlinson: Actually, if somebody is in particular hardship, they can get access to money within a couple of hours, so that is an option. I am not sure how well that has been communicated, but that rule is in place for those who genuinely need it.

We should continue to work with stakeholders. I am very receptive to meeting stakeholders. Throughout the week I meet different groups that will often come and challenge the Government, and hold our feet to the coals. It is right for them to do that, because they are identifying issues. There are a number of cases where a stakeholder with particular expertise has then helped to rewrite and deliver our training. For example, on the very important issue of domestic abuse, I have been working very closely with Women's Aid, Refuge and Mankind. They went over all the training documents and sat through a typical claimant's experience to identify whether things are in place. We are looking to bring further improvements based on their expertise.

Kate Osamor: I just wanted to put on the record that I was never a councillor.

Justin Tomlinson: Apologies.

Kate Osamor: Also, on my visit to the jobcentre, there was a threat of closure and at the time, the visit got dropped, but it was not because I did not want to go there.

Will the Minister answer my question about whether a helpline will be put in place?

Justin Tomlinson: I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not a councillor. I was a councillor before, and I enjoyed it very much. I am sorry that she missed out on that opportunity. I did not pass judgment on the visit—I just said that it would be good if she could make that visit. As a Back-Bench Member, I personally benefited from such a visit.

I brought in a national helpline on personal independence payments when I was a disability Minister. The issue here is a little different. There were national, one-size-fits-all rules on PIP. Universal credit is personalised and tailored, and people need to speak, in effect, to the work coach. What is in place is a partnership manager in every single jobcentre who should be the MP's point of contact. By coincidence, we recognised earlier this week that we suspect that not all MPs know who their partnership manager is. The Minister for Employment responsible for UC has committed to share that information and to make sure that we all have the details of those points of contact, because they are there to help.

Finally, to pick up on a few points, income inequality has fallen under this Government, having risen under the last Labour Government. The average income of the poorest fifth in this country is now up by £400 a year in real terms, while that of the richest fifth is down by £800. There are 1 million fewer people in absolute poverty, including 300,000 children. There is still much more to do. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Edmonton and her wealth of experience; she gave a very constructive speech. I hope she can see that many of the points raised are ones that we are actively looking to address, and that is absolutely vital for all claimants and, in particular, for vulnerable claimants. I thank you, Sir David, for the opportunity to set out what the Government are doing.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

British Bioethanol Industry

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the British bioethanol industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and it is good to have the opportunity to discuss the future of the British bioethanol industry when other matters today are focusing people's minds. I am pleased to see so many hon. Members of different parties here to contribute to the debate.

The bioethanol industry is, regrettably, in a state of collapse. Should this collapse be complete, the industry is unlikely ever to come back again. We are at a seminal point in its life in the UK. I hope that we can convince the Minister to take, on behalf of the Government, the urgent steps needed to secure the future of this important industry. Should we lose it, there will be significant implications not only for the agricultural and transport sectors, but for the wider economy and the UK's decarbonisation and renewable targets.

I particularly thank the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who unfortunately cannot be here to respond on behalf of the Government. He has agreed to meet the British bioethanol industry and me next week. Hopefully this debate will assist in setting out and examining the current issues, including the compelling case why his Department urgently needs to make E10 fuel mandatory at UK petrol stations. Next week's meeting can get straight to how we can make that happen as soon as possible in 2019 in order to reverse the recent collapse in confidence, production and job losses and secure the future of this important industry.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman be willing to let Members who are here today know the outcome of his meeting with Ministers? I remember attending a meeting on the subject of E10 fuel, which I think he organised. I thought that quite a compelling case was made, and it would be interesting to have some feedback.

Nic Dakin: The Minister has agreed to meet MPs of different parties who have an interest, particularly a local interest. I would certainly be very keen to update the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the outcome of that meeting. Should he be available and want to join us, I am sure that would be possible.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I declare an interest as the owner of several older vehicles. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government are right to be careful in introducing E10, which is not compatible with vehicles manufactured before 2000, so it is essential that E5 or less remains available?

Nic Dakin: Nobody is arguing that E5 should not be available. There was an excellent Radio 4 "File on 4" programme just before Christmas that featured Tony Wood, who runs a garage and owns 3 MGs. The reporter Simon Cox asked him about the impact of E10 fuel on older cars such as Wood's MGBs:

“And if they brought in that E10 fuel, what effect—if any—do you think it could have on it?”

Mr Wood replied:

“Well, of course the jury is still out on that, because nobody really knows, but we’ve been running E5 for a number of years and there were stories when E5 came in of the sorts of effects it would have on your fuel hoses, but in real terms E5 has not proved to be much of a problem because most cars have already had their fuel lines changed at some point or another for more modern materials.”

Mr Cox then asked:

“So if the concern with bringing in E10 was the effect on old cars, it sounds like that doesn’t really stack up.”

Mr Wood replied:

“Well, in my opinion it’s probably less of an issue than it has been made out to be.”

Everybody would hope that that would be the case.

Sir Greg Knight: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous, and I hear what he is saying. Will he take it from me that there are cases of E10 dissolving sealants in fuel tanks and blocking fuel lines, which could be very dangerous in some cases?

Nic Dakin: I am drawing on the expertise in that “File on 4” programme. Obviously, any serious issues need to be looked at properly. Nobody wants the introduction of a new fuel to have disadvantages for people. It is very important that E5 remains available, as the right hon. Gentleman indicated.

The British bioethanol industry is perhaps not as widely known as it should be, but it is something of a British success story. Over £1 billion has been invested in the past decade, allowing British workers using British-grown produce to produce British bioethanol to help fuel British vehicles and feed British livestock, while reducing the UK’s carbon footprint and putting fewer pollutants into the atmosphere.

Until very recently, the UK had two of Europe’s biggest bioethanol plants: Ensus created a state-of-the-art facility on Teesside with an initial £250 investment in 2010, and Vivergo Fuels created a £400 million plant in Hull in 2013. Both distilled locally grown wheat to produce bioethanol, with protein-rich animal feed created as a by-product. The Ensus plant could produce 400 million litres of ethanol a year, and Vivergo Fuels 420 million litres. Each employed over 100 people directly as well as supporting a further 6,000 supply-chain jobs, including farmers and hauliers. The UK also has a further plant in Norfolk owned by British Sugar, which can produce 70 million litres a year.

As the Minister is well aware, Vivergo announced in September that it was closing its plant in Hull, and Ensus announced that it was pausing production at its plant on Teesside in November. It is not an overstatement to say the industry has collapsed in only a matter of months, and its future is dependent on the Government taking urgent action on the introduction of E10.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I want to know—the hon. Gentleman might be coming on to this—whether he has done a calculation of the effect on the savings on air pollution that these fuels will have. Maybe he could tell us what that is.

Nic Dakin: I will come on to that in due course. If the hon. Gentleman can be patient, I will come to it when I come it.

John Howell: I am desperately eager to know.

Nic Dakin: I know.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is really important for Teesside and the south Durham area. I want to raise an issue about farming. The National Farmers Union has put out a report on the importance of bioethanol. My constituency covers 150 square miles and is an agricultural area of County Durham. Does my hon. Friend understand what the NFU has briefed on the implications of this for climate change? It could lead to 700,000 cars being taken off the road. We require an infrastructure that can secure that, especially in the agriculture industry, where we can grow the appropriate crops for this kind of industry to prosper. We are missing an opportunity should we not invest in it.

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend makes the point very well and begins to answer the question from the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) about the 700,000 cars that would be taken off the road if E10 were introduced, and on the impact on both air quality and carbon reduction. The bioethanol industry makes an important contribution to farming across the country.

In 2005, the Labour Government gave a very clear message to investors that they would support a substantial growth in demand for renewable fuels, announcing that 5% of petrol sold in the UK would come from renewable sources by 2010. The subsequent coalition and Conservative Governments retained these commitments. On the back of that, large scale investments of over £1 billion were made to ensure that the UK could produce high-quality and sustainable bioethanol to meet forecast demand. During the following decade the Government reduced target levels for renewable biofuels while addressing questions on the sustainability of biofuels. The installed capacity, which was put in place to meet the Government forecast of demand, was substantially higher than demand. Producers have suffered regular and sustained losses, which have led to recent plant closures. Higher demand has not materialised, because at present only E5 petrol with a 5% blend of bioethanol is available at British petrol stations, which is insufficient to support a viable British bioethanol industry as it currently exists.

There have been signals from the Department for Transport that suggested that E10 would be introduced imminently, giving the sector further false hope. The Department’s transport energy taskforce recommended lifting the blend level and reintroducing E10 in 2020. The industry interpreted that as meaning that the Government were fully behind it. Nearly four years on, the Government have still to act on that recommendation.

The Minister’s Department issued a consultation and call for evidence on E10 in June last year. The consultation closed in September, but the Department has yet to publish its response to the submissions. Unfortunately, the consultation did not propose to mandate the introduction of E10. Instead, it proposed the introduction of a protection grade requirement to ensure the continued availability of E5 petrol, representing 95% of all petrol sold today. If implemented, that may be a disincentive to move to E10.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify, if possible, how competitive the fuel is, compared with diesel, petrol and so on? Is the pricing competitive?

Nic Dakin: Yes, it is competitive. It is probably slightly more expensive, but it is a very small expense. Most of the increase in expense would be from taxation.

The call for evidence on ideas to encourage the introduction of E10 was included in the consultation, but again that signalled only further discussion and delays. It is therefore not surprising that the industry appears finally to be losing faith. The Vivergo closure and the Ensus announcement demonstrate that jobs and investment in the bioethanol industry and the agricultural sector are hanging in the balance. When the Government announced the consultation, they said:

“This government is ambitiously seeking to reduce the UK’s reliance on imported fossil fuels and cut carbon emissions from transport. But drivers of older vehicles should not be hit hard in the pocket as a result”

of the introduction of E10.

On the cost, which the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) mentioned, almost all cars built since 2000, and 95% of all cars on the road, are warranted to run on E10, and every new petrol car sold since 2011 is fully warranted to use E10, so about 5% of cars on the roads may have an issue. That includes classic cars, about which the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) raised concerns. Any motorists uncomfortable with using a new fuel can always use the premium brands, which need to remain available.

When the fuel is introduced, the industry would be happy to work with the Department to support a public information campaign about E10, including a website with the compatibility details of all car makes and models. That information would also need to be provided at petrol pumps.

The cost of E10 would depend largely on tax levels. It is predicted that it would cost no more than 1p more per litre at the pump, or about £20 per day. Most of that is made up from taxation, rather than the additional cost. The Government could consider a reduction in vehicle excise duty to compensate for any small increase in running costs resulting from using the more premium fuel, so there is a way through this dilemma. There are straightforward solutions to the possible fuel price issue, but the Minister’s Department might be reluctant to introduce E10 due to concerns from a very small minority of motorists whose vehicles are not fully warranted to use E10. I hope that the Minister will clarify that.

On greenhouse gases, there are broader environmental issues to consider, as has been said. Transport represents 24% of total greenhouse gas emissions—higher than any other sector in the UK economy. It is 1.3% higher than it was in 2013. Bioethanol should be seen as a vital tool in helping to decrease those emissions. The UK is currently failing to reach its statutory targets on the amount of renewables used in transport, in line with the renewable energy directive and the UK’s Climate Change Act 2008. Bioethanol is one of the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective ways of meeting those targets. As has been said, the introduction of E10 would take the equivalent of 700,000 cars off the roads.

Up to its closure, Vivergo Fuels was working on projects with the University of Hull and Bangor University to explore the development of even more advanced biofuels, which would have delivered even greater environmental benefits. Ensus has been working with one of the winners of the Government’s advanced biofuel competition grants, Nova Pangea, to produce ethanol from biomass waste products. Unfortunately, the failure of the UK’s investments in first-generation bioethanol puts at serious risk further investments.

The introduction of E10 would also improve air quality by reducing particulates and carcinogens. In the light of the Environment Secretary’s recent announcements, it would make sense for E10 to be embraced. Benzene and butadiene emissions, both of which are highly carcinogenic, decrease with higher levels of ethanol blending in fuel. Additionally, the oxygen contained within ethanol helps the fuel to burn better and increases the efficiency of the engine, reducing the hydrocarbons that are released. E10 is clearly better for the environment than the current grades of petrol sold in the UK. The concerns over diesel have resulted in motorists moving back to petrol, and the growth in petrol hybrids means that addressing the carbon dioxide emissions from petrol cars is even more urgent.

Although a range of technologies, including electric cars, may play a complementary role in decarbonising transportation and improving air quality, the reality is that electric vehicles represent only a small percentage of overall car sales in the UK—currently around 6% of annual sales—and most are hybrid, so in the short to medium term bioethanol and E10 would make a significant contribution. To have the same environmental impact as the introduction of E10, we would need to replace 2 million petrol cars with electric vehicles immediately.

On foreign imports, the closure of the UK’s domestic production of bioethanol will mean a greater reliance in future on imports of bioethanol and soya bean meal, as a substitute for the high-protein co-product DDGS—distiller’s dried grain with solubles—animal feed, which is a by-product of the bioethanol process. Before its closure, Vivergo was the country’s largest single production site for animal feed. It delivered 500,000 tonnes of high-protein feed to more than 800 farms across the UK—enough for about 20% of the UK’s dairy herd. Incidentally, the fermentation process used at the Vivergo plant also made it the UK’s largest brewery.

Soya bean imports are already at about 1.8 million tonnes a year. The majority comes from non-EU countries, and therefore it is likely that it is from genetically modified crops. There will also be a negative impact on the domestic feed wheat market, as a valuable floor for farmers across the UK, which also enables a premium price in the north-east, will be removed. If Vivergo and Ensus were in full operation with mandatory E10, we would have a comprehensive bioethanol industry underpinning UK environmental progress and agricultural sustainability.

Without a British bioethanol industry, the UK will likely become increasingly reliant on imported bioethanol and bioethanol equivalents, predominantly using cooking oil, which is itself shipped many thousands of miles to the UK from China and the US. By contrast, Vivergo sourced its wheat an average of 34 miles from its plant in Hull, which supported sustainability by minimising transportation. The fact that more and more countries

are starting to use their own wastes locally calls into question the long-term strategy of being very reliant on imported waste materials from across the planet to meet our decarbonising challenge. A greater reliance on imports will not just represent a missed economic opportunity.

Having addressed some of the clear economic and environmental benefits of introducing E10, I would like to reflect on where the UK sits in comparison with the rest of the world. E10 is already widely available across continental Europe, including in France, Germany, Belgium and Finland, and further afield in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. In a real sense, the UK is lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to the use of bioethanol-blended fuel. In some countries, including the USA and Brazil, much higher versions are available, including blends of up to 85%—E85—so the steps we are asking the Department to take are in no way radical or untested.

At a time of increasingly uncertain international trading circumstances, and in the context of leaving the European Union, E10 increases domestic supply for feed and fuel while lessening Britain's reliance on foreign markets for both. The introduction of E10 would bring certainty to British businesses, investors and arable and dairy farmers, while supporting economic growth and securing thousands of existing high-skill, high-STEM jobs, and the creation of many hundreds more. Further research could make Britain a world leader in even cleaner and greener bioethanol.

The sustainability concerns over E10 are now resolved, and the renewable transport fuel obligation has resumed its trajectory and has doubled this year. Bioethanol is the cheapest means of meeting the renewable transport fuel obligation, but its contribution is constrained due to the fact that the UK has not yet introduced E10. Although a transition from E5 to E10 is regarded as inevitable and environmentally desirable, it has not yet happened, and the industry has endured years of delay. The DFT's consultation process late last year did nothing to accelerate it and reassure the industry.

UK-produced bioethanol has excellent environmental credentials and makes an important contribution to the agricultural and food sectors. Without E10 in the British bioethanol industry, the UK will become even more reliant on imports of fuel, proteins and liquefied CO₂, recent shortages of which, particularly during the World cup, have exposed the UK's precarious supply position.

British motorists should have the freedom to make greener choices at the petrol pump. Any remaining concerns at the Department can be resolved and addressed with relatively simple solutions—getting the most polluting cars off our roads can only be a good thing. Many other major developed countries around the world either have already implemented E10 or plan to, and its introduction in the UK has been widely anticipated since 2013.

I urge the Government to now support the sector and mandate the introduction of E10 as a matter of urgency. If not, there is a real risk that the environmental and economic benefits, along with the significant investment and associated jobs created by the UK's bioethanol industry, will be lost.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): There is considerable interest in this debate. I hope that hon. Members will confine their remarks to approximately five minutes, so

that everybody can speak. I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.30 pm, to allow them the 10 minutes each that they are allotted. I call Emma Hardy.

2.51 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes; I hope that this is the first of many such occasions. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing the debate. Just before I came into the Chamber, I was talking to him and I said how tiring it is to feel constantly angry about things. I had just left the main Chamber, where people feel constantly angry. I do not want to get angry and frustrated, so I will settle for deep disappointment and upset instead.

This is significant. The Government's failure to fulfil their promise on E10 is not just an environmental issue, although that is crucial, and neither is it just an economic issue, although it has sacrificed so many high-quality jobs in my constituency. If the Government do not keep their promises to business, how can businesses ever trust them again? What faith can businesses have that we want them to come to my constituency, to invest there, and to provide those good-quality jobs in future? Businesses need to know that the Government can be trusted when they promise that they are going to do something. My contribution to the debate will focus on the wider significance, which is about more than whether to have E10; it is about whether we need a Government who fulfil their promises to business, especially in the uncertain years ahead.

Vivergo closed—it announced that it was closing on 2 August—because the Government did not introduce E10 as they had promised. Vivergo closed its headquarters, which were in my constituency, and consolidated all its staff in the Saltend Chemicals Park in the east of Hull. The Government passed the RTFO in 2018, but they have continued to drag their heels on the introduction of E10. Mark Chesworth, the managing director of Vivergo, said that the closure was the Government's fault, because the political indecision had a highly damaging impact on the business and its jobs, and left it vulnerable to changeable market conditions.

It is difficult to put across Vivergo's significance in my local area. The day that it announced its multi-million pound operation was one of fantastic good news for the area. We want skilled jobs in the constituency. People celebrated and nearly all the local MPs from across the party went there for the photo call and to congratulate the company on opening the plant—it was seen as a good news day. Vivergo contributed money towards Hull's bid to be city of culture, and to wider projects across the whole of Yorkshire. I am not just having a moan about something that affects my constituency; the Government need to understand that the closure's significance reaches far wider than just my constituency.

We in Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle know that we need jobs perhaps more than other areas of the country. Some 7.9% of our population are claiming jobseeker's allowance, which is more than double the UK average. A report by the Centre for Cities think-tank found that Hull has the lowest average wage in the country, at £376 a week. We want high-skilled and high-paid jobs such as those that Vivergo provided.

[Emma Hardy]

The wider impact hits beyond my constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe said, the plant bought 1.1 million tonnes of feed wheat, sourced from around 900 farms across the Yorkshire region. In all the time that I have been active in the Labour party, this is the first time that farmers from the constituencies of Conservative MPs have been so desperate to meet me and tell me their problems, because they do not feel that the party with which they usually associate themselves is listening to them on this issue. Vivergo supported 3,000 jobs—directly and indirectly—and its contribution to the local economy was £600 million.

As a local MP, I want skilled jobs, which is why I have pushed so hard and talked about Vivergo for such a long time. On 30 November 2017 I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on the matter, seeking clarification on the renewable transport fuels obligation. On 15 February 2018 I received a reply from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), which committed to introducing the relevant changes in April 2018. I asked four questions about biofuels and the renewable transport fuels obligation on 8 December 2017. I asked two questions about excise duties and the way biofuels are taxed on 5 December 2017. I met Vivergo in Hull and in London on a number of occasions. The issue is not new to the Government; they cannot claim not to be fully aware of it.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I share the hon. Lady's passion about this issue. She referred to questions she asked back in 2017. I think that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and I have seen three or four successive Ministers about the matter. I say to the Minister that one thing that we want to get from the debate is a positive route to making a decision, rather than keeping farmers, Vivergo workers and others hanging on.

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent contribution. I am fully aware of how long the campaign has been going on and of how long people have been talking about the issue.

The incompetence, the lack of commitment, energy and dedication, and the dereliction of duty—hon. Members can add their own adjectives to describe the Government—has not only cost families in my constituency their jobs and incomes; the damage goes much further. The Government's failure to fulfil their promise could damage future investment from other businesses in the area. It is therefore vital, for that reason and no other, that the Government keep their promise on E10 and take immediate action.

2.57 pm

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing this debate on an issue that affects my constituents and those of many hon. Members present.

As we have heard, the industry contributes £600 million to the UK economy every year. In response to targets on renewables announced by the Government over 10 years ago, over £1 billion was invested in the UK to create state-of-the-art bioethanol production facilities. Last year, the industry crumbled, and the UK's two largest

plants announced that they were either closing, in the case of Vivergo, or pausing production, in the case of Ensus, which has its headquarters in my constituency and its plant in Teesside.

I visited the plant shortly after I was elected as the Member of Parliament for Stockton South. Construction of the plant triggered about £60 million-worth of investments. Ensus is a job creator, and it also helps to support this country's goal of reducing greenhouse gases produced by cars and other vehicles. Over 100 skilled workers from Teesside work on the plant, and Ensus supports a further 2,000 north-east jobs in the supply chain, mostly in farming and agriculture. I visited one of the farms in my constituency—where there are not many farms—that supplies the industry. Two thousand jobs are at risk because of the Government's prevarication.

Ensus is a leading producer of bioethanol. We know that bioethanol is better for the environment and will reduce carbon emissions from transport. It is also well documented just how damaging such transport emissions are to air quality. The emissions damage people's health and the environment. Air pollution causes heart and lung disease, and in parts of our towns and cities it is making the air not just toxic but deadly. For anything else found to be a contributing factor to 40,000 early deaths in this country, Parliament would have thrown everything including the kitchen sink at it, to do everything possible to fix it. Bioethanol is not a silver bullet to improve air quality, but if the Government backed E10 now, that would go some way towards reducing emissions, which would improve our environment and air quality.

Sir Oliver Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the national message is important, and the Government should hear it? Environmental improvement requires green jobs to come through and green industry to be successful. The Government should encourage that and, in this particular case, to have E10 available in Britain is a no-brainer.

Dr Williams: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for making that point more eloquently than me. It is difficult to understand what the barriers to the introduction of E10 might be. Environmental improvement needs to happen through a series of incremental steps—there is no silver bullet—but this one seems to be a win-win.

The owners of Ensus have pointed the finger for the mothballing of their plant in Teesside squarely at the "sluggish implementation of political objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions".

Three years ago, the Department for Transport recommended doubling the amount of ethanol in fuel; three years later, we are still waiting for action. That means that the investment is paused. A huge plant is lying dormant, with workers on stand-by. Without the introduction of E10, bioethanol demand cannot increase above its current level and therefore cannot contribute to further decarbonising petrol. As a result, the future of the Ensus plant remains in question.

I therefore ask the Minister to address in her response how, if there is no demand, the Government plan to replace the jobs that Ensus provides? How long will she let the UK lag behind the likes of Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, which already back E10? Is the Minister willing to do all that she can to improve air quality in this country, with E10 being one step towards that?

My constituents ask me to come down here to Westminster every week to vote for jobs in Teesside. I am also here to make the case for a fair deal for the north-east, to help boost investment in our region, and to support and protect the jobs of people on Teesside.

3.2 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for securing the debate. He and I have a long friendship in this House: we both came here in 2010; we are both Leicester City football supporters—the last two matches have not been good for us, but we hope for better days, and we are still seventh in the league, which at the end of the day is not too bad—and, I am pleased to say, he raises many issues on which I fully and wholeheartedly support him, as I do on this occasion.

Over the years, many Members have endeavoured to pursue and promote this issue, including the hon. Gentleman. I thank them for those endeavours. We have a new Minister responsible for the subject in the Chamber, which I hope is a chance for a positive response. As other Members have done in their contributions and interventions, perhaps she will plot a way forward that can deliver what we have discussed.

I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, a sister body of the National Farmers Union. I will make some short comments from the point of view of the farmers union. I am keen to see how we can all benefit from the promotion of the bioethanol industry sector across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, because if we all pursue the policy, we should all get the benefit.

E10 is a type of petrol that contains up to 10% bioethanol. At the moment, E5 is commonplace on UK forecourts, and it contains up to 5% renewable bioethanol. E10 and even higher grades of bioethanol blends are commonplace in other countries around the world, such as E25 in Brazil—Members might have seen correspondence on that in the papers recently.

E10 legislation would increase demand for UK-derived feed wheat through the increased production of bioethanol. That would decrease the surplus in exportable feed wheat and, in turn, increase the amount of the co-product DDGS, or distillers' dried grains with solubles, received by the livestock sector as high-protein, high-quality feed. At full capacity, the bioethanol industry in the UK would utilise about 2 million tonnes of feed wheat, with about 50% of that intake returned as DDGS. That provides the opportunity to create 1 million tonnes of UK-derived, high-protein animal feed while offering more protection to arable and livestock farmers from the perils of global commodity markets.

When we look at the intricate detail of the proposition, there is a real possibility of deriving benefit in many sectors, and in many ways, from the development of bioethanol. It seems to me that it needs serious consideration. We therefore look to the Minister for a wholesome and full response.

I was heartened by the work of my local council and its recycling endeavours. As an easy-to-grasp illustration of what it had done, for example, it equated its work on increasing recycling and lessening waste to the number of cars taken off the road—it put it in simple language. The UK-wide introduction of E10 would be the equivalent

of removing 700,000 cars from the roads, or 3 million tonnes of CO₂. The information provided to me states that the roll-out of E10 would be the fastest and most effective way for the UK to reach its climate change targets, especially as E10 can be used in hybrid electric cars.

Successive Governments have encouraged people to purchase diesel vehicles, and now they tell them not to, so perhaps we have here a method of addressing that. I emphasise to the Minister and other hon. Members taking part in the debate that we need to spread the job opportunities that could come off the back of this industry across the whole of the United Kingdom. We need to encourage the farming sector, too, which has a key role to play. Will the Minister tell us what incentives, strategies or plans are in place to encourage farmers to look more at the bioethanol industry?

Ethanol reduces greenhouse gases emissions by up to 90% compared with conventional fossil fuels. Indeed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change called for a threefold increase in the use of biofuels in transport by 2030. That briefing went on to note that, at the COP24 summit, renewable ethanol was reported to be the largest contributor to progress in the transport sector, but I believe more can be done.

To conclude, I agree with the hon. Member for Scunthorpe. More needs to be done to understand how best to better use resources to live up to the environmental pledge that we have made, and how to make better use of those resources to benefit us all. It is all about benefiting us all, as well as climate change and addressing those issues. We should be pushing forward with great urgency. I thank the hon. Gentleman again for bringing this issue to the Floor of the House. The debate is much needed and much appreciated, and I look to the Minister to ascertain whether the matter will be acted on in the way that those in the debate wish it to be.

3.8 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing the debate, and it is lovely to be in the Chamber to see three Labour Teesside MPs, as well as other Labour colleagues, leading the charge for farmers and of course jobs.

We have already heard that the bioethanol industry is worth about £1.5 billion to the UK economy annually and supports 6,000 jobs, including apprentices and graduate programmes. However, the industry has been hit by job losses. I will highlight briefly that measures can be taken—the Minister has already heard what they are—to protect jobs and to help growth in the industry, creating future jobs and helping my constituency.

I am sure fellow Members are aware of the thousands of jobs that have been lost around the country by the recent closure of Vivergo and the cuts at Ensus. Northern towns have been hit hardest by the closures, including my area. However, bioethanol is used in making E10 petrol, and legislating for the mandatory introduction of E10 would create jobs. It would also put stability into some of our communities where energy companies are based and be hugely beneficial for the environment. Indeed, many of my constituents have contacted me. Bioethanol is the last thing I expected my constituents to contact me about, but many of them did and they asked me to speak on their behalf today.

Nic Dakin: It was a nice change.

Alex Cunningham: It was indeed—better than Brexit.

As we have already heard, legislating for E10 would bring us into line with other European countries, including Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and other countries much further afield such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Others have talked about the advantages of E10, which are numerous and clear and have been outlined very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe. I will reiterate some of the things he said.

Transport is the biggest offender when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, contributing 28% of the UK's total, but that figure can easily be reduced. With regards to emissions, in 2013, the use of biofuels was equivalent to taking hundreds of thousands of cars—some say as many as 1.35 million—off the road, and it is predicted that many more could come off the road as well.

E10 produces fewer carcinogens, lower particulate matter and fewer nitrogen oxides, and helps to improve air quality. The public health benefits are massive. All those things have a direct impact on my constituency, where there are seven farms. When people think of my constituency, they see industry and pipes and things, but it is quite rural and seven of my farms—I do not own them personally—sold their wheat to the Vivergo plant, which produced bioethanol, but has closed. The farmers were paid a £10 a tonne premium compared with what they would have got on the export market, so many of my constituents are losing money from the industry's decline. They have to find new markets abroad, which are generally less stable for them because of currency fluctuations—we have had plenty of them of late—demand, and even Brexit.

The Navigator Seal Sands storage facility, where Ensus stores and redelivers its ethanol, is also in Stockton North, as are Intertek Cargo and analytical assessment branches that provide services to Ensus. In the neighbouring constituency of Middlesbrough, Stockton North employees are employed by a logistics organisation, AV Dawson, which provides supply chain services for the industry. So the people I represent have quite a stake in any decision by the Government to move to E10 and allow that industry to be redeveloped, with a tremendously positive impact on jobs and farmers' income.

Mandating the use of E10, as we have already been told, would help us fulfil our commitment to the Climate Change Act 2008, in which the UK led the way in a legally binding 2050 target to reduce emissions by at least 80%. Furthermore, the EU renewable energy directive set a target for the UK to produce 15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

The Government launched a consultation on E10 last summer and evidence was submitted on whether and how to best introduce E10 petrol. However, the consultation ended four months ago and still the Government have not stated whether they will support it. The perception is that the Government have been dragging their feet on this issue. For me, implementation of E10 is a no-brainer, as it is for others. Support for fuel with a higher bioethanol content is widespread, from farmers and car manufacturers to environmental campaigners and motorists. It is a puzzle to me why the Government have not made it mandatory at UK pumps before now.

The National Farmers Union also supports the call for E10 as it provides vital opportunities for thousands of farmers, including the seven in my constituency. Without the bioethanol industry, farmers who sell crops for bioethanol production would be forced to export their crops and they would lose, as I said earlier, £10 a tonne if they did that. There are plenty of reasons for the Government to stop dragging their feet and make a positive decision to benefit people in my constituency and further afield, and hundreds of jobs could be created in my constituency.

3.14 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) not only for securing this important debate, but for all his work over many years in championing the bioethanol industry in a cross-party manner.

My constituency of Redcar is home to the Ensus bioethanol refinery, which produces fuel-grade alcohol, animal feed, and carbon dioxide for the beer and fizzy drinks industry. In November, production was paused at the facility for the fourth time since 2011 owing to difficult market conditions. I stand here today to speak up for the employees of Ensus whose jobs now hang in the balance, unsure whether the pause is another temporary blip or a death knell for their industry. One hundred Ensus workers are waiting to hear whether they have a future in an industry that has a huge role to play in this country's transition to a greener, more sustainable economy. The plant also supports around 2,000 jobs in the supply chain across the north of England, so many people are worried about what the future holds. I sincerely hope the Minister will be able to give them some reassurance.

The Government play an important role in shaping the direction of travel for growth industries as part of the industrial strategies that we hear so much about, but it is clear that the present difficulties that the sites face have come about because Whitehall has said one thing, but done another. It has been especially equivocal in supporting the greater use of bioethanol in fuels, which is the cause of many of the industry's problems today. The dithering must stop and this next-generation industry must be supported to be the British—indeed, the Teesside—success story that it has the potential to be.

More than 10 years ago, the Government introduced targets to increase renewables, sending a signal to the bioethanol industry that it was time to invest in the capacity needed to deliver on those targets. Since then, more than £1 billion has been invested in state-of-the-art facilities by bioethanol companies. In 2015, when the Department for Transport's taskforce recommended increasing fuel blend levels to 10%, a further signal was sent to the industry that the Government were fully behind the industry and many in the sector prepared for the future. However, more than three years later, the consultation has only just concluded and we are no further forward. Now the UK's two largest plants, Ensus in my constituency and Vivergo in Hull—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), whose excellent speech was full of passion and a commitment to fight for her constituents' jobs—have announced they will either close or pause production, demonstrating how fragile the situation is. Jobs in the bioethanol industry and the closely connected agricultural sector

hang in the balance. Under this Government, my constituency has already been forced to handle many industrial job losses—more than 3,000 when our steelworks closed—and I do not want to see another industry close its doors for good.

Some of the questions that we need to hear the Minister answer today—I remind her that employees are watching and listening closely—include how she plans to reverse the industry's decline in 2019 and give it the support it needs. Will she commit to giving British bioethanol a future, or will the UK source it from abroad when domestic capacity is lost? As we have already heard today, there are wider implications for other renewable energy producers. Why would investors trust the Government's word and put hundreds of millions of pounds into projects that we desperately need in this country, when, given the experience of the bioethanol project, they might later prove out of fashion with this Government? Certainty and stability is vital for business, and the sector is clear that that has to mean making E10 mandatory for fuel suppliers. Anything less will not provide sufficient confidence that the demand for E10 is there, and the facilities will close for good.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) mentioned, there is a concern for the agricultural sector, too, which produces the feed wheat for the industry and consumes the high protein animal feed co-produced by it. The two industries work hand in hand, serving as a stable and reliable co-dependent supply chain. We are not talking about backing E10 for the sake of the producers. We know there is a strong environmental case for introducing E10, reducing carbon emissions equivalent to the removal of 700,000 cars from Britain's roads, and improving air quality by lowering carcinogens, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and oxides of nitrogen. Given that transport is now the UK's most polluting sector, accounting for 28% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, we will not meet our climate change targets without getting to grips with the problem.

Since 2016, E10 has been the optimal reference fuel for all new cars, meaning some 3 million new vehicles are now ready to use it, and more than 95% of cars—those built since 2000—are warrantied for the use of E10, so there can be no concerns that our nation's vehicles cannot cope with this blend.

This debate is extremely important today because we need the Government to recognise how vulnerable this British industry is, and we need urgent action on E10. I wrote to the Transport Secretary in October to ask for greater urgency in supporting E10. I have also asked many questions in Parliament, as have other colleagues here today, yet here we are with another consultation while jobs in the industry look more vulnerable by the day. Ensus employees in my constituency and people working across the industry and in the supply chain are waiting for reassurance that urgent action from the Government will be forthcoming. I hope to hear that from the Minister today.

3.19 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I too congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on bringing forward the debate, as well as on his work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on British bioethanol. He has campaigned on the issue for a long time, and I commend him for that work.

The debate is clearly important for many hon. Members, given today's turnout and considering everything else that is going on. There is a big debate on the motion of no confidence in the UK Government, yet six Members have intervened and there have been five Back-Bench speeches. That is testament to the importance of the subject and the Minister needs to take heed of that. I note that the six Members who intervened have not hung around to hear the Front-Bench speeches—perhaps I am not a draw in this debate—but they got their points on the record.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe highlighted the critical state of the industry—the partial collapse that has already happened, the job losses to date, and the fact that it is four years since the Government seemed to be going down the route of making E10 mandatory. Obviously, real frustrations come with that situation. He made an excellent opening speech and raised the key issues. In discussing concerns about the effect on cars, he highlighted the fact that only 5% of cars now on the road are likely to have issues with E10, and confirmed that E5 would not have to be phased out but could remain as a fuel for classic cars. I like the suggestion that tax measures could be used to offset costs for people who might be affected. Considering how we treat classic cars for tax purposes at present, that seems a reasonable suggestion.

As always, we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). All the other Members who spoke concentrated on direct jobs, but he focused on farming and the benefits to be gained for all. I do not think anyone could argue with that philosophy. The hon. Members for Stockton South (Dr Williams), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Redcar (Anna Turley)—it is not the first time I have seen the Teesside Collective in action—rightly spoke about jobs in their constituencies, how important the financial hit taken by those constituencies is, and what it means for the wider UK economy. The hon. Member for Redcar mentioned that the area has suffered other job losses, and that it cannot afford to continue to suffer such losses. That is something else that the Minister needs to consider.

Alex Cunningham: The way we understand the Teesside Collective—besides as my colleagues and myself—is as the organisation that has led the way on carbon capture and storage on Teesside. Of course we are hopeful that there will be an amazing plant there. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in commending the collective for the work it has done to secure the plant for Teesside?

Alan Brown: I am more than happy to commend it for that. It is important work on an important environmental issue. When we think about it, that is what we are considering—environmental improvements with E10. Carbon capture and storage would certainly do likewise, and I hope that the work will reach its conclusion.

I am a member of the all-party British bioethanol group and have signed the pledge on E10. I urge any hon. Members who have not yet signed it to do so, and to show cross-party support. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe, talking about the future of the bioethanol industry, highlighted the critical stage that things have reached. We have heard about the job losses to date. Government action is required. It could be argued that there is an issue of vested business interests when the

[Alan Brown]

bioethanol industry campaigns for mandatory E10. However, as other hon. Members have pointed out, there are clear merits in the E10 proposals, so it makes no sense that the UK Government have been dragging their heels. I hope that the Minister will tell us today why they have done that so far, and what they will do to move things forward positively. She has listened to the speeches, but have she or the Government estimated how many jobs are at stake? How many could be created if Ensus were to get back up and running, and what would the long-term future be with respect to developing mandatory E10?

Transport accounts for approximately a quarter of energy demand, but it lags behind other energy sectors in carbon reduction measures. The bioethanol industry estimates that the introduction of E10 would deliver something equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the roads, although, interestingly, the hon. Member for Stockton North gave an upper estimate of 1.35 million cars. Have the UK Government done any analysis of what introducing E10 would equate to, in relation to carbon reduction measures?

The hon. Member for Stockton North highlighted the fact that bioethanol blended with petrol reduces carcinogens and particulate matter and can reduce nitrogen oxide emissions, and commented on what that means for air quality. As a doctor, the hon. Member for Stockton South highlighted the medical issues associated with air quality, and we now know that 40,000 premature deaths a year arise from air quality issues. The UK Government have lost in the High Court three times in proceedings about their air quality plan, so what consideration have they given to the air quality benefits and the long-term impact on health of the mandatory introduction of E10?

Has the Minister considered the benefits of E10 that other countries have assessed? It accounts for 95% of petrol sales in the US and is the biggest selling petrol fuel in France, Belgium, Australia and Canada, among others, so it is commonplace in all the other developed countries. Why is the UK lagging behind? Cars are now designed to run on E10, so new cars running on E5 are running inefficiently. Why would we want that? It means greater fuel use and greater emissions. Let us get E10 and make today's cars more efficient.

The Government may see electric vehicles as a decarbonisation silver bullet but, given that average sales of those vehicles still hover around the 1% bracket, we are a long way from the critical mass of electrical vehicle use that would make a huge difference to carbon reduction. If the Government will not invest enough to get electric vehicle uptake to that critical mass, they need to consider such transitional decarbonisation measures as mandatory E10 and liquefied petroleum gas.

One welcome UK Government measure is the staged increase in the renewable transport fuel obligation from 4.75% to 8.5%, from this month. It is therefore counterintuitive for them not to introduce E10 as a mandatory measure. I would like the Minister to comment on what seems to be disjointed thinking, and what the Department for Transport will do to rectify it.

Hon. Members have talked about the importance of E10 for jobs, air quality and the environment. Why would we want to rely on imports of biofuels in the

future, when we could have a fantastic industry in the UK? I make the same plea that everyone else has made, to bring forward E10 as a mandatory measure.

3.28 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for securing this important debate on an issue that he is committed to. He is a great champion of the biofuel industry.

As we have heard, the bioethanol industry contributes £600 million to the UK economy every year. Over the past 10 years there has been an investment of over £1 billion in bioethanol production facilities. When it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, transport is clearly the biggest offender, contributing 28% of the UK total, as well as contributing to air pollution, as we have heard. I am sure that we all agree that is a serious public health issue. Under the Government's current plans we are not on course to meet our existing climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008. Indeed, last January the Committee on Climate Change warned the Government that their clean growth strategy does not go far enough and that urgent action is needed to meet our legally binding carbon reduction goals in the 2020s and by 2030. In June last year the CCC again warned the Government that we will not meet our targets unless they bring forward new policies such as the introduction of E10.

We know that bioethanol fuel is good for the environment, and that introducing E10 would be equivalent to taking 700,000 cars off the road. E10 petrol is already available in many western countries, such as France, Germany and Finland, and colleagues have also mentioned New Zealand, Australia and the United States. According to the Renewable Energy Association, the introduction of E10 in the UK would be equivalent to replacing 2 million petrol cars with fully electric vehicles. Does the Minister agree that the failure to mandate E10 will make achieving Government targets to source more of the UK's energy needs from renewable sources more challenging?

Labour supports the growth and development of our renewables industry in order to support high-skill and high-wage jobs across the UK, particularly in the north of England, where colleagues have eloquently highlighted two major areas. The Government's failure to support the UK bioethanol industry has led to the loss of around 1,000 skilled jobs. In September, Vivergo Fuels, which is the largest bioethanol producer in the UK, announced that it was ceasing production and mothballing the plant based in east Yorkshire, which employed 150 people directly and indirectly supported 3,000 jobs. Here I will make a local plug because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner)—he wanted to attend this debate but could not due to another commitment—raised that point with the Minister at the time. Vivergo was an official northern powerhouse partner, which perhaps tells us something about the Government's commitment, or lack of it, to the north of England.

One factor leading to the closure of that plant was the Government dithering and delaying their decisions. Does the Minister have a plan for replacing those lost jobs? Does she think that the collapse of the bioethanol industry last year will deter investors from investing in

the renewable energy sector? The industry has been calling on the Government to make E10 mandatory at UK pumps. The Government have said that they would like a market-led solution, but petrol companies have pointed out that without a mandate from the Government such a solution cannot be introduced.

The Government also recently closed a call for evidence, which probably means that we are at least another year away from any introduction of E10. I do not believe that the call for evidence will tell the Government anything they do not already know. Will the Minister say when the response to the DFT consultation that closed in September will finally be published? The Government's lack of leadership and action has led to job losses and the collapse of a key industry. How does the Minister plan to reverse that collapse? Will she now listen to the industry and mandate E10? I look forward to hearing her response.

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes, and I must get it out into the open that I am not the Minister responsible for roads, and neither have I been promoted to that position. Unfortunately, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, (Jesse Norman) is taking part in a debate on a statutory instrument, and I am doing my best to step in. I know it was a bit of a disappointment to one of our colleagues to find that I am not a he but a she.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on securing this debate. Low-carbon fuels such as bioethanol play, and will continue to play, an important role in meeting the UK's carbon budgets. During this debate, and in parliamentary questions, Members with constituencies in and around Hull and Teesside have made clear the wider economic benefits of UK bioethanol production, and the environmental benefits of deploying bioethanol as a transport fuel. Some may consider that to be a niche matter, but the contributions we have heard today show that it is a nationwide issue.

I had not realised that there was a Teesside collective, but now I see how powerful that force is. I thank the hon. Members for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) and for Redcar (Anna Turley), and my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) for their passionate contributions and representations on behalf of the bioethanol industry and their constituencies. I believe that I will cover many of the issues that they raised, but if I do not address them all, the Minister of State will no doubt respond in writing.

The Government understand the potential benefits of the bioethanol sector, and we stressed the benefits of E10 when advancing draft legislation last year—legislation that doubled targets for the supply of renewable fuel between 2018 and 2020. That provided space for a roll-out of E10 should suppliers choose to deploy it. Concerns about not having a clear legal mandate for E10 are well understood by the Department. In September last year, we concluded a call for evidence on whether and how E10 might be introduced in the UK, and if introduced, how it could be done in a way that addresses the concerns of retailers, fuel suppliers and motorists.

The Department has now analysed the responses to that consultation and hopes to publish the Government's response soon. We are continuing to work with the bioethanol industry. Indeed, I understand that the Minister of State hopes soon to meet the hon. Member for Scunthorpe and representatives from the bioethanol industry, and I believe that a date for that has been set in the diary.

Dr Paul Williams: The Minister said that the Government hope to publish a response to the consultation soon, but that is not particularly helpful for people working in the industry who have a mothballed plant and are waiting for a Government decision on the future of their industry. Is there any possibility of the Minister being a little more specific about what "soon" might mean?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman spoke passionately about the Ensus plant in Wilton in his constituency. I cannot make that commitment here and now, but a meeting is due to take place—it is in the diary—and there will be further clarification after that. As has been said, that meeting will be open to all those who wish to attend. I cannot give that confirmation right now, but we are committed to working with the sector to ensure that the plants are open and running as soon as they can be.

Plant closures were discussed throughout the debate. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle made a very passionate contribution, but I must take her up on one point. I know that she wants this debate to be as respectful as possible, because we do not want to reflect what is happening in the main Chamber on all occasions. She mentioned a Government promise, but I would argue that it was never a promise—we must be clear if something is a Government intention and how that should be perceived, as it is very different from the word "promise". We must ensure that we are honest in our contributions.

Emma Hardy: The words I was using were those of the industry, so if the Minister has an issue with a promise being made by the Government, perhaps she should take that up with the industries involved. There is no way that any industry would invest many millions of pounds on a mere suggestion that the Government might be interested in it in future, and if they had not been led to believe that it was indeed a Government promise.

Ms Ghani: An interpretation of how a Government may respond and a promise are two very different things. The Department is working closely with the sector and will do what it can to support it. We must ensure that we understand the difference between what is and is not a promise.

We heard passionate contributions about the bioethanol sector and businesses in Members' constituencies, and the halting of bioethanol production at Vivergo Fuels and Ensus plants last year is saddening and regrettable for all those impacted. I understand the frustration of those calling on the Government to act quickly to mandate the introduction of E10.

Dr Paul Williams: Does the Minister accept that the sole reason for the closure of the Vivergo plant and the halting of production at Ensus was the Government's procrastination?

Ms Ghani: That is an interesting way of responding to how the business environment is dealing with global issues beyond what the Government may or may not have intended to do, so I do not accept that point.

It is clear that UK producers of bioethanol from wheat have faced challenging market conditions, due in part to high wheat prices following a hot summer, and a low bioethanol price—that may in some way answer the hon. Gentleman's question. However, it is by no means clear that an E10 mandate would address all the challenges that the UK bioethanol industry has faced. It is also clear that the introduction of E10 is not without barriers, including the need to take into account the concerns of a significant number of owners of vehicles that are not compatible with E10—that point was raised earlier in the debate. To be successful, it is vital that any introduction of E10 is backed by fuel suppliers and consumers alike.

Since its inception, the policy on biofuels in the UK has been complex and not without controversy. Immediately after the renewable transport fuel obligation scheme—RTFO—was set in law in 2007, the Gallagher review into the indirect effects of biofuel production was published. It became clear that to maintain faith in the emissions reductions achieved and to retain consumer buy-in, we would have to address the negative indirect effects of certain biofuels. To reward fuels that may perform worse than the fossil fuels they replace would have undermined the rationale of a scheme designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It was with those challenges in mind that the Department jointly established a transport energy taskforce with the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, to consider how biofuels can contribute to meeting our climate change commitments in the context of measures introduced to address the negative indirect impacts of some biofuels.

Alex Cunningham: The Minister said a few minutes ago that some cars might not be compatible with E10 or even E5. Of course that is the case, but there are always alternatives at the petrol stations pump: diesel, fuel with bioethanol included or ordinary unleaded petrol. I cannot see that as the barrier that she described.

Ms Ghani: I do not think I described it as a barrier but a challenge. We must understand needs and impacts on consumers, which is why we should not rush, but ensure that what we do has a positive impact on all people.

Sir Greg Knight: I think the point made by the hon. Member for Stockton North is a good one: a choice of fuels available at the pumps needs to remain, and those fuels need to be properly labelled so that owners of cars not compatible with E10 are made aware.

Ms Ghani: My right hon. Friend makes a very valid point about choice; there should be choice also in the cost of refuelling cars and appropriate labelling, too.

Nic Dakin: The changes to labelling that must take place would be an ideal opportunity to introduce E10. It would get the public information out at the same time the Government do what they need to do anyway.

Ms Ghani: Indeed; that is why the consultation took place. As the hon. Gentleman knows, he can take up those issues further with the Minister of State, which is why we need to ensure that when we respond, we take into account all the issues raised in this debate.

The taskforce report to Government noted not only the potential benefits of E10 in helping the UK to meet our renewable energy targets, but the barriers and risks associated with its introduction, not least in respect of ensuring consumer acceptance. It is clear that UK suppliers, including of bioethanol, have made great progress in ensuring that renewable fuel delivers reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Since the RTFO was introduced in 2008, savings in greenhouse gas emissions have increased significantly from 46% to 70% in 2014-15. Latest data suggest that current biofuels provide an average 71% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions even when land use change impacts are included, but it has always been essential to evolve the policy on biofuel. That way, we maintain the integrity of the schemes that promote its use, such as the RTFO.

Following the work of the taskforce and building on the success of the RTFO, in September 2017, the Government set out a 15-year strategy for renewable transport fuels. The strategy established an investment platform to develop sustainable advanced fuels for automotive, aviation and road freight. I am proud to say that, as part of our strategy for renewable fuels, in March 2018, regulations were agreed that make the UK the first to set targets for renewables in transport beyond 2020, all the way to 2032; and the first and only country to set development fuel targets to drive a market for advanced low carbon fuels. For the first time, we have made aviation fuels eligible for reward under the RTFO. Our 15-year strategy for renewable transport fuels is designed to maximise the industrial opportunities to be gained for the UK while maintaining public confidence in the value of renewable fuels.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe has previously shown support for increased biofuel supply targets in the 2018 regulations. He has also been clear in calling for a mandated introduction of E10. As I said, I am not in a position here and now to update colleagues on when we will publish a response to last year's consultation on whether and how to introduce E10, but E10 is our main focus in the biofuels policy area. We are working hard to publish the Government response as soon as possible.

Dr Paul Williams: I understand that the Minister is not in a position today to tell us when the response will be published, but if I were the owner of a mothballed plant, probably trying to persuade my bank and investors, I would need some kind of certainty. Would the Minister pledge to write to us in the next week to give us a date on which the consultation response will be published, just to help the businesses that need certainty to make future decisions?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman once again champions the employers in his constituency very well. As I said, I do not believe that the time it has taken to ensure we make the right decision on E10 via the consultation is the only reason those businesses are in a challenging position. As I mentioned, a meeting is due to take place; that meeting will be the best time and place for a letter to be forwarded. The hon. Gentleman will be in the best place to challenge the Minister of State and get the responses he needs.

Nic Dakin: Do the Government see the British bioethanol industry as an important industry to the UK? If time continues to disappear, the industry will disappear and we will have to rely on imports.

Ms Ghani: Indeed, and I apologise if I have given any other interpretation. Without wanting to give a promise, we see this sector as very important to what we are trying to achieve.

Anna Turley: I am deeply frustrated that the consultation closed such a substantially long time ago. Can the Minister identify the barriers in the civil service and the ministerial process to getting a decision? In the light of today's debate, was there not some kind of briefing, impetus or a rocket put under this urgent issue? Will the Minister confirm that, following this debate, a rocket is under it?

Ms Ghani: The Teesside massive, as I will call them, have no doubt put this issue back firmly on the Minister's agenda, although no doubt it was already there. We always want to ensure that any consultation we undertake provides a good response to all involved—not just the sector providing the fuel but those putting the infrastructure in place and owners of classic or older cars.

There was mention of the impact on international roll-out. I was reflecting that the roll-outs in Europe have been quite mixed: in some places, they have done well and in others they have not fared as well as one might have assumed. We have to ensure that we get this right. I am hearing, and no doubt the Department is too, frustration at getting a response. That is why a meeting was agreed.

Emma Hardy: I am sure the Minister understands how frustrated everyone feels, including businesses. To go back to the central point of my speech, does the Minister not acknowledge that trust in the Government will be undermined, potentially undermining investment in areas such as ours, where it is desperately needed?

Ms Ghani: When Government make rash decisions that are not fully thought through, when a sector is involved, that further undermines trust in Government. That is why it is our responsibility to ensure that we get the right decision. Unfortunately, on occasion, that can take time. The hon. Lady's frustration has no doubt been noted. It is absolutely right that if and when we roll out E10, we do so in a successful way, not least for EU bioethanol suppliers.

Given the barriers to introduction, it is right that we have taken time to learn from the experiences, good and bad, of the roll-out of E10 in other countries. If a decision were taken to mandate E10 further to last year's call for evidence, we would also need to test the costs and benefits against firm proposals, ensuring that all those with an interest, including fuel retailers and motorists in particular, have an opportunity to submit evidence. If E10 is rolled out in future, the Government remain committed to ensuring that E5 remains available and that any introduction of E10 is well managed, with information on compatibility made available to vehicle owners.

Anna Turley: I appreciate the Minister giving way—she is being extremely generous with her time. I want to pick up the point about costs. We know that the cost of

ethanol is lower than oil; unfortunately, bioethanol is currently more highly taxed than petrol, which makes E10 fuels about 1p more expensive—about £20 per year for the average motorist. Tax incentives are extremely important to incentivise behaviour. Are the Government looking at tax incentives to encourage the roll-out?

Ms Ghani: The Government will be looking at all issues to ensure that, if a roll-out is suggested, it is an option favourable to those pulling into petrol stations. That is why it is interesting to learn what has happened in Europe. In France, I believe, the roll-out was more underwhelming than had been expected and in Germany it did not deliver the impacts that had been hoped, so it is important that we look at this closely.

Dr Paul Williams: Is the Government's view that they need to mandate the roll-out or that the industry should lead the roll-out itself, without a Government mandate?

Ms Ghani: The hon. Gentleman is trying to tease out a statement from me, when he knows that he has to wait for the consultation to get the response that he wants. I thank him for his tricky intervention, but he will have to wait for the consultation response to get the answer.

The Government agree that the aim must be to reduce emissions and that low carbon fuels must play a part. The regulations made last year introduced a greenhouse gas reduction obligation on suppliers and incentives for the development of fuels capable of delivering higher greenhouse gas emissions reductions. These allow us to reward low carbon fuels because of the emissions reductions they deliver. We have also made £20 million of match capital funding available under the future fuels for freight and flight competition. In the wider context, the Government have recently published two major strategies focused on combating climate change and improving the UK's air quality. Our Road to Zero strategy sets out a clear pathway to zero emissions vehicles by 2050, and this week we have published our clean air strategy. The pathway is not just about driver behaviour and electrification. Low-carbon fuels will continue to play a vital role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the vehicle fleet.

The renewable transport fuel obligation, as amended last year, is expected to save nearly 85 million tonnes of CO₂ over the 15-year period from 2018, which represents around a third of transport's projected contribution to UK carbon budget savings during the 2020s. In achieving those savings there is an opportunity to increase the amount of bioethanol in petrol, from 5% today up to 10%.

Alex Cunningham: The Under-Secretary is doing a grand job stonewalling on behalf of the Minister of State. If there is one message that we would ask to be taken back, it is that we desperately need a date and we need that certainty. Will she commit to go to the Minister and say, "Look, these guys are going to bash your door down if you do not actually make a decision and make it soon"?

Ms Ghani: I believe that the door has already been bashed down, because a meeting is set in the diary.

Anna Turley: With the Teesside massive?

Ms Ghani: That meeting is in place with the Teesside massive, as I am referencing them now. I completely understand the frustration about not having a date, but we need to make sure that we get this absolutely right. A meeting is a place and that can be raised directly with the Minister.

It is not agreed that there is conclusive evidence to show that switching from E5 to E10 will have a significant impact on air quality but I would like to assure Members that, as with all policy on low-carbon fuels, we will continue to assess our policies and support against the ambitious targets we have set to improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

If we were to mandate E10, it could give suppliers an opportunity to meet those carbon budget targets in a more cost-effective way. That is why the Department has consistently made clear its desire to work with industry in considering an E10 roll-out. The Government are mindful that rolling out E10 is a huge change to the UK petrol market. If such a roll-out were not managed well, it could impact on motorists across the UK. It is important that we prioritise consumer acceptance and ensure the vehicle fleet, consumers and retailers are ready. As was raised throughout the debate, that is a big responsibility for Government to undertake. We need to make sure that everybody is ready and any decision we make is not rushed.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the debate for taking the time to further inform our thinking on E10. I must not forget the intervention made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Jim Shannon: It was a speech, actually.

Ms Ghani: Forgive me. I know that the hon. Gentleman has spoken very positively about the bioponics of E10. The bioponics will be accounted for in our response to the consultation when it is published.

I thank everyone for contributing to the debate. The use of biofuels is and will remain a challenging policy area. However, this must never stop us from finding the right balance between maximising the contribution that low-carbon fuels can make to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and taking into account the interests of consumers.

3.54 pm

Nic Dakin: I thank all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) pointed out, 11 Members contributed in speeches and interventions. I have underlined the importance of the industry for high-quality jobs, green jobs, farming, air quality and carbon reduction targets. It is a very important issue, which has been properly underlined.

I welcome the fact that in her conclusion the Minister said that she and the Government want to work with the industry to deliver an E10 roll-out, if that is what comes out of the consultation. I hope she heard my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who asked her to take a rocket from the debate, so we can get a date and know what is happening. I look forward to meeting the Minister of State next week, with colleagues across the House and representatives of the British bioethanol industry. We will further the argument and hopefully get good responses from him, on behalf of the Government, so we can go forward effectively and make sure that the British bioethanol industry is one not only for now, but for the future, and will contribute significantly to what is happening.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of the British bioethanol industry.

3.56 pm

Sitting suspended.

Guildford Borough Council

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Guildford Borough Council and its local plan.

I am delighted to have you here, Mr Betts—an expert in the very field we are discussing—and also the Minister. Some years back, I had the same sort of role that she has now, although I did not have the entourage behind me. I used to do debates such as this on my own; I think they were too embarrassed. I am very aware that the Minister cannot comment on the specific details of a local plan in her position, which is quasi-judicial. She must be broad and not specific in her replies. Given the time constraint, I intend to try to set the scene, but I will write to the Minister in the next few days with considerably more detail.

The Mole Valley constituency is not coterminous with Mole Valley District Council; the eastern wards of Guildford Borough Council are within my constituency. They are therefore covered by the Guildford council as regards planning, including the draft local plan. Local residents were consulted, as is standard for local authorities in developing their plan. The plan relating to some of the eastern wards involves massive—and I mean massive—loss of green-belt land. For many residents, the green belt was the basis of their desire to live in Mole Valley; it is what makes it attractive. Protests from individuals and groups, especially parish councils, was particularly vigorous, but it was also careful, constructive and thoughtful. In my opinion, the disregard for the views of those dissenters to the plan, and the manner of that disregard, during the progressive consultations by the council leadership was not good.

Of the land that makes up those wards, a significant majority is green belt or similar. Thanks to our robust planning rules, any development that takes place on that land cannot be of high density or particularly high rise. It is therefore only logical that, when Guildford Borough Council looks around for locations on which to develop, it should look first at brown-field sites, as it has done. It should look to offset increasing height and density with innovative design; the Minister and I know from our local government days that that is possible in some particularly difficult areas of inner London.

This Government, including, if I may say so, my hon. Friend the Minister, has made it clear that that should be the default approach to planning home development in local authority plans. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who incidentally is a resident in one of the wards in question, recently highlighted the importance of this approach to English local authorities more broadly, not just this one. With that in mind, I am here to highlight the fact that Guildford Borough Council has produced a draft local plan that puts a full 59% of the proposed new development on green-belt land. On top of that, the council has also brought forward deeply concerning proposals for placing a large quantity of industrial land in the little village of Send, on top of a large increase in homes on green-belt land.

The main town for the borough of Guildford is, unsurprisingly, Guildford town. It is an ancient town; the archaeological footprint goes back to Roman days. Clearly, it is a place that must be protected, and it is, but around Guildford town and beyond there are brown-field sites, places of little ecological or historical worth, that could be utilised to meet the borough's housing need. It is true that many of these sites appear in the local plan, but they are not being utilised in an innovative way that would best unlock their potential. I believe the council should look further at building higher and denser buildings, particularly around prime sites such as the railway stations, which would provide well-positioned, affordable homes to the younger generation of busy commuters in a busy commuter town.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend may be aware that Guildford has run into difficulties with many villages over the production of neighbourhood plans. My intervention is just to tell him that I too am aware of that, in my role as Government champion for neighbourhood planning, and I am dealing with the problem.

Sir Paul Beresford: I thank my hon. Friend; I think Guildford council, with its behaviour and reputation, will keep him rather busy.

By definition, the surroundings of those villages cannot have a building of any significant height or density. The number of homes per acre of footprint must be low. I wish to concentrate on just two specific areas, the village of Send and the Wisley site, as examples of what this draft local plan would mean if implemented. Both feed on to the A3, which feeds to Guildford to the south, London to the north and the M25 via junction 10. The A3 is overloaded at peak times, and junction 10 is the worst junction on the M25 for delays, heavy traffic and accidents. In recognition of that, Highways England is proceeding through the rigmarole of extending and developing the junction. However, its work will merely enable the better management of the current traffic flow. I believe that Highways England has not factored in, or has not been able to factor in, the increase that would come from the developments proposed for Send and Wisley, and others. Neither Send nor Wisley has a railway station.

Those problems were a major factor in the rejection of the recent appeal to develop the Wisley site along the lines now suggested in the local plan. That rejection followed Guildford council's refusal of an application by the owners and developers of the Wisley site. There was an appeal where, after a lengthy—I think it was five weeks—inquiry by the inspector, who endorsed Guildford council's refusal, the decision was backed by the Secretary of State. The three main reasons for the Secretary of State's refusal were damage to the green belt, lack of infrastructure and traffic overload. It was a sensible decision all round. I even applaud Guildford council for refusing the application. I ask the Minister, then, to imagine the general amazement when Guildford council did an unabashed and blatant volte-face and shamelessly put the Wisley plan back into its local plan, in spite of everything it has done and in spite of what the inspector and the Secretary of State had said.

There has been a long history of refusals on the site, predominantly on the grounds that the site is green belt and that development would cause considerable difficulties

[Sir Paul Beresford]

on local roads as well as the A3. The majority of those local roads are winding and narrow and there is no realistic hope that they could ever sensibly be expanded. They generally have no lighting and mostly no pavements, and the nature of the roads is not conducive to cycling—although that does not deter the packs of cyclists who go up and down the roads, particularly at the weekends. The Wisley site, if developed, would result in an isolated island of properties, which would need a full range of infrastructure purpose-built at great cost to make the site even remotely viable. In other words, it would end up as an urban island damaging a rural area.

The promoters behind the Wisley adventure are numerous and the links that bind them together are nothing if not convoluted. There appears to be a Russian influence behind the proposers. We know that, for example, the leader of Guildford Borough Council took a trip, or trips, to Russia with a councillor from the Vale of the White Horse, who was working with the Wisley owners. I understand that the reason for the visit was to encourage Russian development in the UK and presumably in Guildford, with an emphasis on Wisley. I understand the interest, because if Wisley is developed the investors stand to benefit considerably—given the sums of money involved, it may be more accurate to say enormously—but, of course, that is not a planning issue.

I will now briefly turn to the village of Send, which, like Wisley, has no railway station and thus also feeds traffic on to the A3. The village has a single two-way central road, with a number of minor roads branching off. The village is surrounded by green-belt land, with development limited to infill opportunities. The village has about 1,660 properties and a population of about 4,000. It is a village, although if Guildford council has its way, that will change.

The local plan proposes to increase housing in Send by 40% as a starter, with four new slip roads on to the overloaded A3. Additionally, Guildford Borough Council will dump 40% of the borough's new industrial development on this little village. The overload is obvious.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for listening patiently as I outlined the threat these villages face. I hope she will now indulge me a little further as I gently remind her why the decision to build on green-belt land is so objectionable. Most obviously, it directly contradicts the Government's policy. The national planning policy framework makes it absolutely clear that permanence is the central feature of the green belt, and that development on it can be sanctioned only in genuinely exceptional circumstances. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), when he was Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, wrote to me confirming that local housing need does not meet the threshold to be considered exceptional.

For all the problems that the development of these sites will create, I am perhaps most concerned about what would be lost. It is widely accepted that only the presence of the green belt has prevented runaway urban sprawl from London and preserved the unique, rural nature of areas such as my constituency. Remember, both sites are right on the edge of the M25 and right on the edge of what we consider to be the spread of London. I therefore resist in the strongest terms any action that undermines the integrity of the green belt,

and I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that when that land is gone, it is gone forever, as she will know from our time working together in inner London.

In this context, the willingness of the Guildford Borough Council leadership to demolish so much green belt in these wards is deeply distressing to me and my constituents. It has been noted by some that both wards under threat are not currently represented by Conservative councillors, and have not been for some time. However, knowing the council leader as I do, I am quite sure that that was never a factor in his thinking. It is certainly not a planning issue.

At this stage of the inquiry into the local plan, my hon. Friend the Minister could make a number of moves, if she agrees with my concerns. She could call in all or parts of the plan, or she could direct modifications to it. At the very least, she could put the plan on hold while she and other experts look at the points that have been made.

In complex cases in my professional field it is routine to seek a second independent opinion. Perhaps the Minister could ask the inspector who sat for the five-week Wisley appeal and rejected the application if he could look at both these cases—particularly the Wisley application, because it is identical to that which he advised the Secretary of State to refuse.

4.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Ministers' Financial Interests. Mr Betts, do you mind if I shuffle around a bit? Of course I should not have my back to the Chair, but I want to address my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) directly.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on local plans—particularly the draft Guildford local plan—and more specifically on the use and development of land within the green belt. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the subject and thank my hon. Friend for the interest he takes in housing, planning and green belt matters, and for bringing these important matters to the Government's attention. I am also grateful for the opportunity to debate with my predecessor, as a Minister in a former incarnation of my Department, and former leader on Wandsworth Council.

It may come as a disappointment to my hon. Friend that I cannot comment on the specific details of the emerging Guildford local plan, although he mentioned that he already knows that. The Secretary of State has appointed an independent planning inspector to examine the plan, and at some point the Secretary of State may be called upon to act formally in relation to the plan. It is therefore important that he is seen to be acting impartially and allowing due process to run its course in the interests of all parties and the integrity of the planning system as a whole. However, I hope that my hon. Friend will find my contribution at least helpful.

I will start by talking about the importance of local plans in the round. The planning system should be genuinely plan-led, with up-to-date plans providing a framework for addressing the social, economic and environmental priorities for an area, which of course

include housing need. Local plans are prepared in consultation with communities and play a key role in delivering needed development and infrastructure in the right places. Community participation is a vital part of accepting the development required to meet our housing needs.

Effectively engaging with communities throughout the process creates the best plans. Having an up-to-date plan in place is essential to planning for our housing requirements, providing clarity to communities and developers about where homes and supporting development should be built and where not, so that development is planned for, rather than the result of speculative planning applications. The Government are determined to build the homes our country needs and help more people get on the housing ladder. We are committed to delivering 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s through policies that aim to make better use of land and vacant buildings in order to provide the homes that communities need.

My hon. Friend raised a very good point about where it is appropriate to have higher density use—around railway stations or wherever. I am sure that point has been forcibly made to the planning inspector at those public meetings, and I am sure that, where appropriate, the planning inspector will take that on board.

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that, during the presentation of the local plan, the inspector inquired as to why there was not enough of that sort of development.

Mrs Wheeler: I am always interested when planning inspectors ask nuanced, leading questions of local plans and answer them themselves at the same time. We await the planning inspector's comments with interest.

As my hon. Friend correctly stated, the Guildford local plan is currently under examination, with further hearings due to be held on 12 and 13 February. That will give two more opportunities for people already involved in existing issues to make further comments and for the public to attend and listen. The resumed hearings will focus specifically on the implications of the 2016 household projections for objectively assessed need and the plan's housing requirement. They will not be an opportunity to discuss matters already considered. Following the hearings, we expect the inspector's report and recommendations to be published later this year. I encourage my hon. Friend and his constituents to study the findings of the examination at that point.

I reassure my hon. Friend of the robustness of local plan examinations. During an examination, an independent inspector appointed by the Secretary of State will robustly examine whether the plan has been prepared in line with relevant legal requirements. That includes the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities and whether it meets the tests of soundness contained within the national planning policy framework, including the extensive consultation requirements for involving local communities.

The inspector, in examining the plan against the tests of soundness, will consider, among other things, whether the plan is based on a sound strategy. In examining these matters, the inspector will take account of the

evidence underpinning the plan, national planning policy and the views of all persons who made representations on the plan. I trust that reassures my hon. Friend that the examination of a plan is a thorough and robust process.

As the Guildford plan was submitted for examination before 24 January 2019, it will be examined against national planning policy set out in the 2012 national planning policy framework, including the rules on green belt development, which I will say a little bit more about later. The 2012 national planning policy framework maintains strong protections for the green belt and sets a very high bar for alterations to green-belt boundaries. It allows a local authority to use its local plan to secure necessary alterations to its green belt in "exceptional circumstances". The Government do not list the exceptional circumstances, as they could vary greatly across the country. Instead, it is for plan makers, and the planning inspector at examination, to check that any change is fully justified. Each local authority is expected to plan to meet local housing need, in full if possible, over the plan period. The local authority then has to consider where to find land to fulfil that need. Only if it does not have enough suitable land because of other constraints and circumstances can a local authority consider a green-belt boundary change. That is the national policy position relevant to Guildford's draft plan.

The revised national planning policy framework, published in July 2018, will apply to any plan submitted after 24 January 2019. In that framework, following consultation, we clarified the steps that a local authority needs to take to ensure that green-belt release is being proposed only in exceptional circumstances and is fully evidenced and justified. The new framework makes it clear that, in order for exceptional circumstances to exist, the local authority should be able to show that it has examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. As I hope my hon. Friend will appreciate, there will therefore be more specific tests to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist. That will help examining inspectors to pick up on inadequate efforts to find land. It will still be up to inspectors to decide whether the level of evidence provided meets the exceptional circumstances test.

I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley for raising these important issues. He is aware that the Secretary of State has powers to intervene formally in a plan until it is adopted by an authority. However, we consider it important that the plan is allowed to run its full course and be tested properly first, before such action is considered. I strongly encourage my hon. Friend and his constituents to study the findings of the examination carefully when the inspector issues the final report later this year. I genuinely do thank my hon. Friend for his great interest in this matter. The green belt is precious to us all, as is housing for our children.

Question put and agreed to.

4.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

UN Climate Change Conference: Government Response

4.29 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK Government response to the UN climate change conference 2018.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank all colleagues who are here for this important debate, particularly on a day such as this. I was disappointed that the Government felt it was not necessary to give an oral statement following their attendance at COP24. I am pleased that we have the opportunity today to debate and ask the Government the important questions about the action they are taking on climate change.

World leaders arrived at the UN climate talks in Katowice last month with a mandate to uphold the 2015 Paris agreement and respond with urgency to the climate crisis the world is facing. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report warned of the urgency of this crisis when it recently stated that we must act now to cut emissions in half and limit global warming to 1.5° within the next 12 years, or face catastrophic impacts of climate change.

Global temperatures have been rising for over a century, notably speeding up over the last few years, and are now the highest on record. We know that this causes negative impacts, such as melting of Arctic sea ice, rising sea levels, prolonged heatwaves and chaotic weather conditions. We know why. We release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels for energy, farming, industry and transport, to name a few. These carbon emissions are causing the earth to warm faster.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. According to the latest UN report, there will need to be a tripling of ambition globally to avoid more than 2° of warming, and a fivefold increase in ambition to avoid 1.5° of warming. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister should highlight what additional measures she is planning to ensure that the UK cuts its own emissions and, at the same time, what additional support the Government will give to developing countries around the world, so that they will meet their targets, too?

Anna McMorris: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention. I am coming to his exact point. It is now more urgent than ever that we take action to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. Hopefully, the Minister will respond to all the important issues that we are bringing forward. Does the hon. Lady agree that, with the UK on course to miss its carbon reduction targets and its legally binding target of 15% renewable energy by 2020, it is essential that the Government step up to the plate and ensure that we address this issue urgently? As the hon. Lady rightly says, all of us across the world will suffer.

Anna McMorris: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we are set to miss our crucial international targets.

Jim Shannon: Legally binding targets.

Anna McMorris: Absolutely. During those two critical weeks of discussions in Katowice, we saw a distinct lack of political will to tackle climate change with anything like the urgency required. Predictably, countries such as the United States and Saudi Arabia sought to deny the science, and routinely disrupted proceedings. However, far too many countries came unprepared to strengthen the international climate process and to agree to finance all targets, leaving us with gaping holes in the rulebook for meeting those targets. Unfortunately, the UK was one such country.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. She talked about targets. Does she agree that if we are to meet our obligations under the Paris agreement, we have to aim for net-zero greenhouse emissions before 2050, and if we are serious about meeting that target, the Government must stop dragging their feet and legislate for that net-zero emissions target?

Anna McMorris: I completely agree with my hon. Friend on that important point, which I will address in my remarks. I hope the Government will respond adequately.

We saw that too many countries came unprepared to agree to those targets, leaving gaping holes in the rulebook. COP24 was a perfect opportunity to achieve two crucial objectives. First, it was a chance for nations to come together and take the deeply troubling recommendations of the IPCC special report on climate change seriously. Secondly, COP24 should have been used to strengthen the pledges in the 2015 Paris agreement, which experts agree is failing to deliver the action needed to meet its ambitious goals. The Paris agreement has us on course to live in a world of between 2.7° and 3.5° of global warming. Yet we are currently set to reach 3° and more.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The hon. Lady is giving a really powerful and eloquent speech, I am only disappointed that the debate has been given so little time. There are two nations that are already at 2°: Mongolia and Tibet. Mongolia is the size of Europe; Tibet is the size of western Europe. It is also where 49% of the world's population get their water from. We are already seeing temperatures in excess of 2°. Does the hon. Lady agree that we have had enough time for talking and counting the clock down? We are talking about Brexit right now, but this should be the biggest issue and much more time should be given in the House for debate on this matter.

Anna McMorris: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is the biggest issue the world is facing right now. We have been given only a one-hour debate in Westminster Hall—we had to push for that; I am very disappointed that the Government did not make an oral statement in the Chamber.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Given the advice from the Energy and Climate Change Committee to the Minister on how to reach net-zero emissions, does my hon. Friend agree that we should have Government time on the Floor of the House to debate this issue more fully?

Anna McMorris: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that the Government will consider that very seriously. The lack of leadership from those with responsibility to prevent suffering from climate change, I believe, is shameful. This Tory Government have done little to show that they are serious. We have sat back and allowed other nations to water down our multilateral commitments, and Governments to kick the can down the road and push any concrete decisions on countries cutting emissions to 2020.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I entirely agree with the hon. Lady, but of course all nations, including this one, must do their bit to meet climate change. It is also important, however, not to run this country down. Is it not right to say that coal production and use is rising in India, Russia and Vietnam, but this country will phase it out by 2024? Is that not something to celebrate?

Anna McMorris: Yes, we are doing a lot on climate change, but not enough, and we are not showing adequate leadership internationally.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I echo what others have said about the importance of this debate. I am grateful that the hon. Lady secured it; a number of us tried to, but she was the one who succeeded and I am glad. On the point about the UK doing enough, is it not the case that it is easy to say, “We’re getting rid of coal, so we’re the good ones”, when in fact we are outsourcing our emissions to poorer countries? We benefit from our own consumption, but the emissions caused by that consumption are on the account of the exporting country—we should have consumption emissions, not just production emissions.

Anna McMorris: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady: we should have those consumption emissions at home in the UK and we should examine what we do, and how we count and account for the emissions that we create.

We have allowed the wealthy Governments internationally to dodge their responsibility towards the poorer countries. At Katowice, climate finance was defined in such a loose way that there is no certainty that adequate finance will be provided to help smaller countries meet their climate obligations. We have allowed loopholes to continue, which the wealthier Governments will continue to exploit.

I have secured this debate to focus attention on the action that this Government must take if we are to prevent runaway climate change—not what sounds good, but what will actually lead to hard outcomes. It is striking that it took at teenager speaking at COP24 to bring some attention to what needs to happen.

In the Minister’s written statement following the conference, she claimed that the UK Government were championing the latest climate science, but where is the evidence? The UK Government’s ambition for a net-zero carbon cluster by 2040 sounds good, but how will we deliver it? The Government have stated that they will be on track to meet the net-zero target only after the fifth carbon budget in 2032, which means that without speedier action over a much shorter timeframe, between 2032 and 2045, achieving net zero by 2045 is not feasible.

Why should we be surprised? We are still on course to miss those international carbon reduction targets. What are the Tory Government doing about that? They have

sold off the green investment bank. They have scrapped the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Levels of new low-carbon investment are lower than when they took office. Subsidies and support for tried-and-tested forms of renewable energy sources, such as onshore wind and solar, have been cut, which has put jobs and new low-carbon projects at risk.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. On solar, she knows that the Government are slashing funding for solar energy, ending the feed-in tariffs for solar producers and proposing to end the exporting tariff. Does she agree that that approach has cost 12,000 jobs to date—including in Cardiff, her city and mine—and shows that the Government’s climate plan is not worth the paper it is written on?

Anna McMorris: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Those are the tried and tested technologies that we should absolutely be supporting if we are going to move our economy to a low or zero-carbon economy, which we need to do to prevent runaway climate change.

New projects such as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon are given short shrift and ignored, but fracking is still going ahead, even under our national parks—apart from in Wales and Scotland, of course. There was not a single mention of climate change in the 2018 autumn Budget. It seems that the Government simply do not see climate change as a priority.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the 25% cuts to the number of Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff dedicated to dealing with climate change further strengthen her argument that the Government are not taking tackling fossil fuels seriously?

Anna McMorris: My hon. Friend makes an important point. If we are to take the threat seriously, we need to resource it properly, and not just in the Minister’s Department but across Government, and to make it an absolutely priority.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that climate change is an interlinked issue? We are asking our Government to make representations to the Trump Administration and others who tried to block proceedings at COP24, but we need to make sure that we emphasise to them that climate change is connected to issues such as immigration, which are at the fore in the Brexit debate here and in the US, where they are trying to build walls. If we do not help developing nations, such as the Maldives, Bangladesh and others, which will be partially or fully submerged, we will have even more immigration and desperation from the residents of those nations.

Anna McMorris: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Climate change affects everyone, everywhere. We in this country have a duty to protect those suffering and most at threat, including those on the frontline where those changes are taking place. That is climate justice and it is why adequate finance needed to be agreed at COP24.

Chris Law: To develop that point, I am the climate justice spokesperson for the Scottish National party and a member of the International Development Committee. The Committee recently visited Kenya and Ethiopia to see at first hand why migrants end up in refugee centres, some of them for 10 or 20 years. It is directly related to the climate.

I have two things to say to the Minister. First, a lot of funding that is distributed through the Department for International Development is short term, so the projects that are happening that aim to embrace renewables are small-scale and are for only one or two years, so things are not being developed systematically. Secondly, the World Bank cancelled all upstream oil and gas projects from 2019 so that there will be long-term sustainable renewable projects throughout the world. Unfortunately, the UK Government still fund upstream oil and gas projects throughout the developing world, which will be left with that legacy long into the future. Does the hon. Lady agree that steps need to be taken now?

Anna McMorris: That is a really important point. We need to make sure that adequate steps are taken in all areas of Government and that action is taken to reach out to communities that are suffering on the frontline where climate change is most urgent.

Climate change needs to be a priority. The Government do not see it as a priority, but that must change. We need climate policies and targets that will lead to urgent reductions in carbon emissions. First, we must get working on achieving net-zero emissions by 2045 immediately, not push it down the road. The technology and the infrastructure are there. The Government just need the political will to get moving on the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and make climate change a priority. The UK was once a global leader on climate change. Let it be that again. The Climate Change Act 2008 was the world's first legal framework to set binding carbon and emissions targets. It needs to continue to live up to that precedent.

The Minister needs to think more like the Welsh. A commitment to sustainable development has long been a distinctive feature of Welsh devolution. Before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was the specialist adviser for environment and climate change in the Welsh Labour Government, and I am proud of my work helping the Welsh Government to lead the way with a green growth agenda that provides an alternative model for business. Climate policies are entrenched in the Welsh legislative framework through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. A future generations commissioner has been appointed in Wales to ensure that that commitment is being delivered, which puts Wales above and beyond many Governments around the world, especially the UK Government. In Wales, a focus on low-carbon communities encourages communities to come forward with small-scale renewable energy schemes and changes to infrastructure and transport. That brings about change from the bottom up and hardwires the ability for our communities to be sustainable, which extends to the way that our housing is built and managed in Wales.

Across the UK, I want to see changes to our building regulations to ensure that we are building sustainable housing, which will make it cheaper and easier for everyone, and that there are energy efficiency targets.

Action on fuel poverty in Wales has brought together outcomes on tackling climate change and on local skills training and jobs, and has helped to lift people out of fuel poverty. We need to see such policies across the whole UK, not just in Wales. That change to our economy will ensure that green growth is rooted in our businesses, our services and our communities.

Jo Stevens: Given the importance of European Union grants to green energy projects in Wales, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be good to have confirmation from the Minister today that those sorts of projects will be able to apply for funding from the new UK shared prosperity fund? We were hoping—we were told—that the public consultation would be open by last year, but it has not happened yet.

Anna McMorris: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. It would be good to hear from the Minister on that exact point.

In the light of yesterday's Brexit vote, we need to keep in mind our role within the European Union and the importance of our being a full EU member. The EU has become the global environmental standard and regulation setter, and it has used its significant influence in trade to tackle climate change. Last year the EU announced that it would refuse to sign deals with countries that did not ratify the Paris climate agreement. That meant a huge shift in how the EU was perceived and in the action it is taking. Brexit also threatens to have hugely negative consequences for our climate action here in the UK. The loss of EU funding and leaving the EU emissions trading scheme would all mean a significant weakening of our ability to take action.

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): Will the hon. Lady accept an intervention on a factual point?

Anna McMorris: I will.

Claire Perry: I know that the hon. Lady is extremely knowledgeable, so I am sure that she will be aware that since 2000 the UK's reduction in carbon intensity is 60% higher than the EU's. That is enshrined in domestic legislation. Therefore, I am sure that we will continue to overachieve relative to our EU partners. I would hate for this exceptionally important global debate to be narrowly focused on Brexit.

Anna McMorris: I thank the Minister for her intervention. I think that it is a wider point, and a very important one, to talk about the impact that Brexit will have on our domestic legislation here in the UK. For example, the loss of EU environmental legislation, which covers roughly half of the UK's emissions reductions up to 2030, and losing our place as a key advocate of bold action within the EU, will demolish, at a single stroke, Britain's role as a key player on climate change. We cannot solve this climate crisis as a single nation; climate change recognises no borders.

As I saw with my own eyes in the Arctic recently, climate change is already wreaking havoc on our world, our communities and those who need us most, and it is only set to get worse. It is time for the UK Government to face up to the imminent risks and show leadership.

Our response to climate change will define us for years to come. It must be a bold part of the work of every single Government Department, leading the way from the top down to the bottom up. We are rapidly reaching crisis point, and we need to start acting like it.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I think I have three hon. Members who want to catch my eye, which means basically five minutes each, if they could keep to that. I call Mary Creagh.

4.53 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Thank you very much indeed for that guidance, Mr Betts, and for your courtesy in calling me to speak. I am aware that I arrived a little late, but I was doing some media on the report on sustainable seas by the Environmental Audit Committee. I was over the road to do that, before running here through the rain.

May I begin, Mr Betts, by saying what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship today, and to have such a brilliant and committed member of the Environmental Audit Committee as we have in my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin)?

Safeguarding the future for the planet and for our children is one of the defining challenges of our generation. The climate change conference—COP24—was a real opportunity to take decisive action in this area. I will very quickly focus on the scale of the challenge, the solutions that are already available and, of course, the finance that we need to put behind any action.

I will start with the Arctic, which I and the rest of the Environmental Audit Committee visited last year. We saw for ourselves the unprecedented extreme weather that the Arctic faces. The climate is a closed system, so when we warm the ocean, the climate redistributes that heat through the winds, the currents and our weather. We are performing a giant experiment on ourselves, our planet and our oceans, and it really is a very dangerous experiment.

In 2018, the Arctic experienced its third winter heatwave in a row. During winter polar nights—so no sunshine—there were temperatures of 28°C in the Arctic this year. We know that the average temperature rise of 2°C disguises the extremes in temperature that we see at the North Pole. For example, a 1°C rise at the Equator means a 7°C rise at the North Pole, and the temperature in the Arctic has already risen by 5°C, which has huge impacts on the mammals that live there, and of course on the humans who live there, even down to the way that they build their houses.

In this country, we had the “Beast from the East” in March 2018. We were proud to launch our inquiry into UK heatwaves with the snow lying thick on the ground. The Committee Clerk turned to me and said, “Chair, nobody wants to give evidence about heatwaves when there’s snow lying on the ground”, and he was right. But we struggled through that and launched our heatwaves report in 35 °C of searing heat, and we had the hottest ever summer in England. These are extraordinary times. I was walking in the Peak District above Sheffield, Mr Betts, up Lost Lad hill, and I looked at the Derwent reservoir, which was only 75% full, and the village of Derwent and its church spire were now visible.

The world’s leading scientists have warned us that we have just 12 years to avoid devastating climate change. They gave us a report that spelled out the difference between a 2°C rise and a 1.5°C rise. Under a 2°C rise, we lose all the world’s coral reefs; under a 1.5°C rise, we lose “just” 90% of them. That shows the damage that is already baked into the best-case scenario. Of course, in the UK heatwaves raise the spectre of heat-related deaths, such as those in 2003, when there were 2,000 excess deaths in just 10 days. We have never known so much and we have never realised before just how much we have to do.

Our Committee produced a report on greening the finance system and we heard that the carbon bubble presents a huge systemic risk to our investments and our pensions. It presents liability risks, as oil and gas companies are potentially sued; some of them are being sued by the state of New York for some of the damaging issues that came with Storm Sandy. It presents physical risks to us, including the risk of tidal and coastal surge, and of course the transitional risk. If someone’s pension is invested in an oil and gas company and that company cannot get its reserves out of the ground without reaching 4°C, 5°C, or 6°C of warming, their pension is essentially valueless.

We need to move very quickly to green the financial system to avoid a carbon bubble bursting in an unmanaged way. We also need to move much more quickly to mobilise green finance into our economy: into solar, wind, and the new technology that we need.

The two tried and tested examples of carbon capture and storage come from nature: soils and forests. We conducted an inquiry into soils and globally the top foot of soils—the 30 cm of soil around the Earth—holds double the amount of carbon that is in the atmosphere, and more than all the carbon held by all the forests and the oceans combined.

Soils are absolutely critical and I am really glad that the Government signed up to the 4 parts per 1,000 initiative last year. What concerns me is that we do not have a route map to achieve that goal. We have got some great scientists in the UK; they know what the soil content has been over the last 50 years. We need to start paying farmers, through the common agricultural policy, or whatever succeeds it if we leave the European Union, to make sure that we measure, monitor and increase our soils’ carbon content.

I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North about withdrawing the finance for feed-in tariffs and the difficulties that the green deal has had, including the problems that people have had with it, and the scrapping of the energy efficiency measures in our homes. If we want climate solutions, we must also have climate justice, which means keeping people warm and safe in their homes.

The climate conference was held in Katowice, a coalmining region of Poland. Can I make a bid that, if the UK holds the climate conference in 2020, we hold it in the coalmining region of Yorkshire, which is an example of how we can swiftly move to the new green economy and create jobs in the process? I am sure that Sheffield, Mr Betts, Wakefield and Leeds would be happy to argue the toss over who should win that bid.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I call Alex Sobel to speak, but only for four minutes now, I am afraid.

5 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Betts. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) for securing this debate. She is not just an excellent constituency MP; she is a leading voice on this issue, here and for the people of Wales, so it is great that she was able to secure this debate and make her speech. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) said, the IPCC has told us that we have 12 years to restrict global warming to 1.5°. It has already risen by 1° from pre-industrial levels. This nation was the first to industrialise, which we should be proud of; it was also the first nation to de-industrialise. Many of the comments the Minister made in her intervention relate to our early de-industrialisation and, obviously, our early industrialisation.

The Centre for Industrial Energy, Materials and Products—which includes researchers from the great University of Leeds—has shown that the UK will miss the fourth and fifth carbon budget targets, which are binding on us under law and are part of our agreements under the conference of the parties process. Those carbon budgets take us to 2032, and CIE-MAP has found that one of the five sectors of most concern was construction. What has happened in housing? When the Government came in in 2010, they scrapped the code for sustainable homes—something that would have kept us on track to meet our carbon budgets for housing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) said, the feed-in tariff proposals take us further away from that target. We need to build low-carbon modular housing, and we need to take control of that process and not listen to the siren voices of the volume housing developers.

We need to look at vehicles—an area in which we are way behind. The Norwegians are talking about phasing out petrol and diesel by 2025, just six years from now. We are talking about a target of 2040, and we cannot even give a clear answer on whether we are going to ban hybrids; we can imagine lots of gaming of the rules if we allow hybrids to continue. On food and drink, the Germans have a plan for resource efficiency. We have no such plan; we are way behind. On clothing and textiles, the Government need to look at the Environmental Audit Committee's report—its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, is here, as are several other members of our Committee. That report arose from our sustainable fashion inquiry, and we found so much that could be done within the UK fashion industry and its main production facilities, which are abroad, to make fashion more sustainable. In electronics and appliances, we are not doing enough to drive down electricity use. There is no catching up here; there are no second chances. The Government have said that we will be net carbon zero by 2050, but if we do not do the right thing over the 12 or 13 years to 2032, we will not be able to catch up in the 18 years between 2032 and 2050. It will be game over for our global climate. Who wants that legacy hung around their neck?

Lastly, we are on track in energy production because coal-fired power stations are being scrapped. The industry itself has seen the future, and has already decommissioned or moved into biomass and other forms of energy production. However, if we think the solution is continued gas production—undertaking shale gas extraction in

the United Kingdom—we will again fall behind our targets when we move into the fifth carbon budget. We cannot allow that to happen. We need to look at alternatives, including domestic solar, onshore and offshore wind, hydrogen, hydro, and obviously tidal lagoons, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North is a great champion. If we do not do that, we will again be behind, and will not meet the legally binding targets that we must meet as a nation. The Government must do better. In the main Chamber, Members are debating confidence in the Government, and part of the reason for my lack of confidence in this Government is their failure to tackle the catastrophic climate change that we will face if we do not meet this challenge.

5.4 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Betts, and I again congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) on securing the debate. The UK has historically played a leading role in global climate negotiations; for example, it pressed for the 1.5° ambition in the 2015 Paris agreement. However, in the words of the former UK climate envoy, John Ashton,

“Rule one of diplomacy is, walk your talk: otherwise people stop listening”.

The tragedy is that in recent years, the global leadership role that the UK played on the international stage has been undermined by the systematic dismantling of climate policy at home. We have heard some of this already, but since 2010, Ministers have scrapped zero carbon homes; sold off the Green Investment Bank; made it almost impossible to build onshore wind farms; cut off support for solar power; made no progress on phasing out fossil fuel subsidies; gone all out for fracking, which is quite extraordinary given that that is a whole new fossil fuel industry; and in the area of energy efficiency, which is all too often a poor cousin in these debates, we are woefully behind on some targets—for example, retrofitting some of our most energy-inefficient homes. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, we could be over 50 years late in getting that target sorted.

The impact of those failures is incredibly real, and we have heard from the Committee on Climate Change that once again, the UK is way off meeting its fourth and fifth carbon budgets. “With each delay,” it says,

“we stray further from the cost-effective path to the 2050 target.”

Beyond that, the sad truth is that even if all those policies were still active, it would not be enough. The problem is that our economy is built on the assumption that precious minerals, fresh air, clean water and rare species can magically regenerate themselves in an instant, and that somehow the Earth will expand to meet our ever-expanding use of resources. The reality is that we have stretched the planet beyond its limits and, without a bold reimagining of how our economy works, it will simply not be able to spring back into shape. The UN 1.5° report made clear that we need to cut emissions to net zero by the middle of this century, but the global economy is set to nearly triple in size during that same period. That makes the job of decarbonisation massively greater.

Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old climate activist, told world leaders at COP24 in December that

“if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself.”

She was right. Of course, we need massive investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency and a new, clean public transport system, but we also need to think far more boldly about the way we integrate concerns about our natural world in the way we run our economy. Crucially, we need to limit the resources that we all use. Those in the global north who can radically reduce how much they consume and throw away must do so. We must find new and innovative ways to recycle and reuse materials; there is much talk of dematerialisation and decoupling from energy and consumption, but the truth is that there is no example anywhere in the world of absolute decoupling in anything like the timeframes that we will need if we are serious about getting off the collision course that we are currently on with the climate crisis. We have a huge job of work in front of us.

I am really grateful for this debate, and I want to add one last thing: my quick scan of *Hansard* suggests that over the past year, there has been only one debate in the main Chamber on climate change. That is not good enough. I hope that we can reinvigorate the all-party parliamentary climate change group, and I invite everyone at this debate to join that APPG so that we can be a bigger force in this place for better climate policy.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): We will now hear from the Front Benchers. The Scottish National party and the Labour party spokespeople each have five minutes, and the Minister has 10 minutes.

5.8 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) on securing this highly topical debate. She is an unswerving member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and I am always impressed by her knowledge, her astuteness and the way she expresses herself in that Committee, which is ably chaired by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who is also here today.

Some relevant points have been made by other speakers, particularly regarding missed targets and the UK Government's lack of political will to face up to their responsibilities. Climate change should lie at the heart of every choice that those in power make, for those decisions affect every individual on our planet. We only have one planet—we cannot make any more—and we should be mindful of that every time we make a decision. In the face of the present climate emergency, the possibility of the UK's 1970s status as the dirty man of Europe returning is becoming more distinct, and I am very fearful of that, as is everyone who attends the Environmental Audit Committee and other committees on climate change.

As has been mentioned, only in October last year the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that we have 12 years to make the unprecedented and unparalleled changes needed to prevent global temperatures rising by above 1.5°C. Exceeding that by even half a degree risks global catastrophe, including floods, fires and famine.

Scotland has long been a leader in the fight against climate change, and we will continue to forge the way in tackling the crisis. The UK Government should look to us, and probably to Wales, for a successful holistic approach to what will be terrible blights on our community if we do not act. A decade ago, in 2009, Scotland set

itself the world's most ambitious greenhouse gas reduction target when the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to cut the country's emissions to 42% by 2020. The latest statistics show that we remain well on track to achieve that.

In 2012, Scotland established the world's first climate justice fund, seeking to mitigate the damage caused by climate change on the world's poorest communities. By 2021, £21 million will have been distributed through the fund, which is now supporting 11 projects in Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania and Rwanda. Before the United Nations climate change conference, the First Minister announced a further £200,000 for action to tackle climate change. That will be provided to the body supporting the implementation of the Paris agreement. As well as that, the decarbonisation of Scotland's electricity sector and reductions in emissions from waste have seen us outperform the UK overall, as emissions continue to fall year on year to nearly half of 1990 levels.

Scotland is committed to achieving a substantial reduction in emissions as soon as possible. We have already reduced emissions by 49% compared with 1990. We have met our annual statutory targets for three years running, and are outperforming all countries in western Europe except Sweden. By 2030 we will have the equivalent of 50% heat, transport and electricity consumption supplied from renewable sources—achievable ambitions to do the right thing. A landmark Scottish energy efficiency programme was rolled out in 2018. We will phase out the need for petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032 through an expansion of the vehicle charging network in urban and rural Scotland, investment in innovative solutions and, most importantly, leadership on procurement from the public sector.

The Scottish National party remains concerned about how climate change will be tackled after the UK's departure from the EU. The UK Government must give—I hope to hear this from the Minister—clear assurances that there will be no reduction in standards and targets, or that appropriate powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. That is the best solution. I look forward to the Minister's comments on that very point.

It is clear that the consequences of climate change are environmental at first but can quickly become political and military. The long-term security implications of climate change must therefore be considered when forming defence policy. I look forward to encouraging more green business. It was a pleasure to help with the recently announced Scottish stock exchange plans. I was asked to further the awareness of the Bourse business development through my network of friends and companies that I know. The ethics and environmental and social impact objectives of the Euronext ambitions for long-term investment are sound corporate practice. That will open up excellent opportunities for all companies that wish to grow within Scotland.

I thank the Minister and hope that she has listened to what I have said. Mother Teresa always said, "If you want to change the world, you begin in your own little corner." I believe that in Scotland we are doing that.

5.13 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Thank you for your guidance during the debate, Mr Betts. I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin), and indeed all my hon. Friends who have spoken so eloquently in the debate.

[Barry Gardiner]

When the Minister responds, I am confident that she will remind the House that the Government was a progressive voice in Poland. That is true. Along with other members of the High Ambition Coalition, the UK pledged to step up our ambition by 2020. It is easy to be a progressive voice when what is needed is progressive action, but progressive action requires political will. Repeating a promise that every nation made in Paris three years ago does not show political will. What was needed in Katowice was a clear commitment to deliver on the ratchet process that Paris put in place.

The Minister and I have many political differences, but I say to her in all sincerity that if in a few minutes she were to rise and use the platform of this debate to pledge that the UK will reach net zero emissions before 2050, as Labour has committed to do, I would not play politics. I would welcome her announcement publicly, because it is the right thing to do. Of course, it is a pledge that must be backed by a coherent plan, but in my view it is necessary if we are to chart a way that is even remotely compatible with keeping below the 1.5°C threshold.

I also suggest to the Minister that she may care to reflect that there is also a very good political reason for her to make such a pledge. Failing to do so would make a mockery of her bid to host next year's conference of the parties. Labour wholeheartedly supports holding COP 26 here in 2020, but as things stand we have serious reservations about whether the Government are up to the task.

We should look at the condition of the UK's climate diplomacy team, which was referred to earlier. In 2009, under Labour, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had an army of climate staff—277 strong. Seven subsequent years of Tory austerity halved that. Then the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) became the Foreign Secretary, and the number of officials working full time on climate fell to just 55. I ask the Minister what discussions she has had with the current Foreign Secretary about restoring that workforce of climate diplomats.

Climate diplomacy matters now more than ever. At COP24, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait refused to welcome the IPCC's report. Our climate diplomats should have known that in advance and taken active steps against it. When they finally made their position public, our Government should have offered criticism. They did not, just as they did not when President Trump announced his decision to withdraw from the United Nations framework convention on climate change.

Leadership means speaking out. It also means acknowledging our responsibilities as the nation that ushered in the fossil fuel era. Rich nations like us have evaded calls to support the victims of loss and damage. Can the Minister tell the House what we, the fifth richest country in the world, are doing to address loss and damage in the most climate-vulnerable nations resulting from our addiction to fossil fuels? That would be climate diplomacy that could genuinely bring about change at a UK COP.

This year the Warsaw international mechanism for loss and damage is up for review. It is the perfect moment for the Government to make us the first developed nation to provide additional financial contributions to

address loss and damage. The latest figures show that climate aid reached \$70 billion in 2016—still short of the 2020 target of \$100 billion, which COP24 agreed would rise from 2025.

Will the Minister provide an assurance that the UK will take on its fair share of that increase? Will she confirm that she has had discussions with the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary about how they will increase the UK's contribution towards international climate finance in the next spending review? I am not asking for figures; I am simply asking whether those discussions have taken place in Government. If not, will she accept that they are a necessary precondition to any credible bid by the UK to hold the COP?

Of course, the last thing I want is a trade-off that reduces still further Government finance for tackling climate breakdown here at home. As has been said, investment in our low-carbon economy is at its lowest level in a decade, down 57% in 2017. Will the Minister acknowledge publicly that, according to the independent assessment of the Committee on Climate Change, her clean growth strategy does not get us back on course to meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and will she explain why, for all her protestation about the effectiveness of energy policy not being simply about how much money the Government spends, she still thinks that the 75% capital allowances for the fracking industry are a sensible use of public money?

I ask the Minister not whether she has read the IPCC report—for all our differences, I acknowledge that she is a diligent Minister and know that she will have done—but whether she will state publicly that she agrees with it. Will she explain to the House why, having read it, she can conclude that the Government's current policies constitute a sensible response to the climate crisis that it outlines?

Mary Creagh: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Barry Gardiner: I cannot, because of the time.

We need radical, transformative action, and we need it now. The IPCC report demanded

“rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society”—

a far cry from what the Government are offering.

Denial comes in two packages. I do not accuse the Government of denial of the science, but there is another sort: denial of what it will take to stop climate change. Among the many speeches by world leaders at COP24, I was most affected by the words of the 15-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg:

“We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis.”

Those are the words of the next generation. I hope that the Minister will heed them and act accordingly.

5.20 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): Thank you for your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Betts. I have been asked an awful lot of questions and I have limited time to respond, but I will be happy to try to answer them further later. I will instruct my officials to write to hon. Members, particularly in answer to the factual questions asked by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner).

As always when we have this conversation—perhaps this is a little reminiscent of the debate going on in the main Chamber—I feel as if we are looking at two different sets of facts. I accredited the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) to attend the Katowice talks and I know that she was disappointed that she could not go, but I am a little saddened by her accusation that my officials were not prepared for those talks. It remains the case that our civil servants—more than 150 people in the international climate finance team and in my excellent negotiating team—go to conferences of the parties extremely well prepared. We are perceived to be one of the most effective negotiating teams in the world. Because the negotiations often happen late at night, I was privileged to sit with that team—

Anna McMorrin *rose—*

Claire Perry: Let me finish please, because I am concerned about the time.

I was privileged to sit with that team in the room and see the impact of our responses, both on the EU and on the global climate proposals. Although the hon. Lady could not attend, as an expert in the area she will know that we were never going to have a change of individual or collective ambition at this COP. We have set out a very clear pathway for what the COPs are expected to achieve. COP 2020, which I have expressed interest in hosting in the UK, will be the one at which we show our national determined contributions, but we cannot manage what we cannot measure. One of the great points of controversy in the COP process has been whether collectively we can agree an inventory calculation mechanism and a rulebook to assure ourselves that the world is on track. Despite the low expectations, I think we achieved that at COP by levelling the international playing field, which is particularly important for our UK businesses, and by building trust.

The hon. Lady rightly referred to points made early on at COP. There were concerns from some countries, but as is often the case, I saw a coming together at the end, with an enormous amount of collective action and a rulebook that is more than sufficient for its purpose and flexible enough to allow for the differential between ambitions in different parts of the world. I pay tribute on the record to our superb civil servants who led the negotiating team. It was particularly poignant because in Katowice we could taste the coal on the air that we breathed—a reminder of one of the challenges of the whole process.

I know that these debates exist for hon. Members to make political points, but many Opposition Members are far more intelligent than some of the points they tried to make. On the issue of just transition, as the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) will know from her constituency work, persuading the world to create immense job losses in primary industries and tax people more to invest more Government subsidy in areas that will help to drive that transition is a non-trivial challenge. On an issue so vital to the world, I would have hoped that we might one day have a tiny measure of cross-party consensus, but I guess we all live in hope.

Anna McMorrin: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: I will try to leave the hon. Lady a moment to wind up, as it is her debate.

As hon. Members pointed out, the conference was rooted in the IPCC report, which is very much supported by our superb UK science base—another area in which we have led the world in this space. The report gives a very stark warning on what the risks would be. The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, referred to the challenge that small islands face. The subject was discussed at length at the Wilton Park forum, which we are proud to co-host with New Zealand and at which we discuss the issues facing countries looking down the barrel of climate change—an existential threat to small island nations.

Of course, it is entirely right that collectively we need to do more. Again, we seem to live in a world of different facts. We were the first Government of an industrialised country to address how we will get to a zero-carbon future. It is not about setting some kind of target for when we will all be long gone—I am sure none of us will be in government by then, and some of us may even be six feet under. It is about “how”. The difference with this Government is that it is not just about empty targets, uncosted numbers or a promise to bring back the proposal for the Swansea power station, which would have been the most expensive ever built in the country and would have created 30 jobs and taken two months of Port Talbot’s steel supply—I can think of much better ways to spend taxpayers’ money. It is about actually setting out a detailed action plan for “how”. That is important because our policy making has to survive the travails of politics and successive Governments.

We have a Climate Change Act that was strongly supported across the parties, and we have budgets—I am not going to go through the debates again. On our current numbers, we are 3% and 5% off the budgets that will end in eight and 10 years’ time, and I am pretty confident that we will get there. We have a Prime Minister who is committed to it, and we have clean growth as a fundamental part of our industrial strategy.

It was suggested in this debate that we have somehow rowed back on our climate diplomacy. The reason we are so successful is that this is a fundamental part of who we are and what we do. Our offer to the world is premised on clean growth. The almost £6 billion of taxpayers’ money that I spend on their behalf as part of international climate finance is focused 50% on adaptation and 50% on mitigation, but we are also thinking about how we can take brilliant British inventions such as the solar fridge funded by the Department for International Development and change people’s lives in the developing world.

Chris Law: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: Very briefly, but I want to leave the hon. Member for Cardiff North a moment to wrap up.

Chris Law: I thank the Minister for giving up such precious time. She makes valuable points about international investments, which is all well and good. However, I would really like a response to my earlier point that in the countries most directly affected by climate change, we have multi-billion pound investments in oil and gas.

Claire Perry: I find it odd to hear an SNP Member, who represents a country that claims that its entire independence policy is based on oil revenues, being dismissive of the same activities in other countries.

Moving on to climate action, I agree that we can only ever be credible when we talk to other countries if we try to lead from the front. We have reduced our emissions more than any other G20 member over the past 20 years. We have published our clean growth strategy—a very detailed set of actions. We had our first ever Green Great Britain week. From listening to some hon. Members, one would think that we were still massive coal emitters, but we are at over 32% renewables—we hit a monthly high of 54% in August. As hon. Members know, I have set a challenge for us to have the world's first net zero industrial cluster by 2040. I have held a conference on carbon capture, usage and storage that was considered to be the most senior and committed gathering in the world. We are driving global action—we should be proud of what we are doing, and we will continue to lead from the front.

It was nice to hear, on a point of consensus, that the Labour party supports our bid to host COP 2020, where the rubber hits the road. I pay personal tribute to the hon. Member for Wakefield for her Committee's work—I know that yours is doing fine work too, Mr Betts. Giving evidence to hon. Lady's Committee and looking

at its reports and recommendations is vital. That is the sort of cross-Government and cross-party consensus that delivers results.

5.28 pm

Anna McMorris: Thank you, Mr Betts, for chairing the debate. I also thank hon. Members for their excellent contributions, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

I do not doubt that the Minister is very sincere in her intent to change things and the way she wants to do so, but this takes more action—it requires action right across Government. I was at the climate negotiations when they were last held in Poland in 2013, at which 300 members of the UK Government were present, with Scotland and Wales there. There has been a weakening of that priority. It needs to be ramped up, with action right across Government—we are not seeing that at the moment. The issue reaches across the political divide. It goes beyond party politics—

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statement

Wednesday 16 January 2019

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting on 8 January in Brussels. A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2019/01/08/>

Presentation of the priorities of the Romanian presidency

The Romanian presidency provided an overview of the priorities for its first presidency, which began on 1 January 2019. The priorities of the presidency are organised around the four pillars of: a Europe of convergence, a safer Europe, Europe as a stronger global actor and a Europe of common values. The presidency reminded Ministers of the challenges that lay ahead during its six-month tenure and called for strengthened cohesion among member states.

Multiannual financial framework 2021-27

Ministers discussed the progress required on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) negotiations over the course of the Romanian presidency. The presidency indicated that it

intended to include the MFF on the agenda of every meeting of the GAC during its six-month tenure, with the intention of reaching an agreement on the negotiations in the European Council in autumn 2019. The Commission reiterated the need to reach agreement by autumn and indicated that it wished to see agreement on spending in areas such as Digital Europe and a new partnership with Africa.

Co-ordinated response on disinformation

Ministers discussed how to respond to the threat of disinformation, taking into consideration the forthcoming European parliamentary elections. The discussion followed a number of recent initiatives at EU level on tackling disinformation, such as the "Joint Action Plan against Disinformation", which was endorsed by EU leaders at the December European Council. Ministers discussed which elements of the action plan should be prioritised.

I intervened to stress the importance of co-operation with third parties, including NATO. I also underlined the value that the UK placed on the support and co-operation it received from member states following the attack in Salisbury last year, when we worked closely and shared information on the Russian disinformation campaign.

Legislative files

The presidency provided an overview of various legislative files that it wanted to advance during the coming months, including: the MFF 2021-27, the digital single market, the banking union, security-related files and Brexit preparedness proposals. The Commission pressed for the conclusion of as many files as possible before the European parliamentary elections.

[HCWS1250]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 16 January 2019

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Mental Health Support Teams

The following is an extract from Health and Social Care Questions on Tuesday 15 January 2019.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that the Health and Social Care Committee interrogated the Government's plans on mental health for our young people. We found a massive gap: many schools that are passionate about their students' mental health have had to cut the provision that they previously provided, including the educational psychologists, the councillors, the pastoral care workers and the peer mentors. Can she tell us—as the Education Minister could not tell us—what her plans will replace? We know that an army of those professionals are no longer working in our schools.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I know that the hon. Lady is very passionate about all this, and I can say to her that, in rolling out this additional support, we do not want to

crowd out anything that is there already. It should genuinely be working in partnership with the provision that has already been undertaken, but we recognise that we need to be rolling out further investment. We are introducing a new workforce that will have 300,000 people when it is fully rolled out, but we must ensure that we invest in the training in such a way that it will be effective.

[Official Report, 15 January 2019, Vol. 652, c. 1004.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger).

The correct response should have been:

Jackie Doyle-Price: I know that the hon. Lady is very passionate about all this, and I can say to her that, in rolling out this additional support, we do not want to crowd out anything that is there already. It should genuinely be working in partnership with the provision that has already been undertaken, but we recognise that we need to be rolling out further investment. We are introducing a new workforce **that will treat 300,000 people** when it is fully rolled out, but we must ensure that we invest in the training in such a way that it will be effective.

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**not later than
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